ANCIENT INDIA

Textbook For Class XI

MAKKHAN LAL

ANCIENT INDIA

OLD NCERT

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FOREWORD

The Higher Secondary stage in education is crucial in many ways. At this stage, children are better placed to exercise a choice of courses keeping in view their interests, attitude, aptitude and capabilities. They may choose either a specialised academic course or job oriented vocational courses. This is the stage of maximum challenge. Students themselves are passing through an age-specific critical phase of their lives — transition from adolescence to youth.

The *National Curriculum Framework for School Education* – 2000 (NCFSE – 2000) developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training takes all these factors into account. After nation wide consultations, the NCERT decided to prepare new textbooks in each area. It became essential in view of the pace of change particularly in the last decade of the twentieth century. These changes have created visible impacts in every field of human endeavour and activity. The NCERT continuously attempts to perceive the learning needs of the future citizens who would be contributing professionally in their careers.

The preparation, and teaching and learning of the new textbooks in history are an essential part of it. The new techniques and technologies, new excavations and explorations have resulted in fresh interpretations of several situations in history which is one of the major electives of study at the Higher Secondary stage. As per the recommendations of the 1988 curriculum framework of NCERT, history as a separate subject is to be introduced only at the Higher Secondary stage. Before this stage it is studied as an integral part of social sciences. This fact initiated the development of a fresh set of history textbooks for Higher Secondary classes. Globally, writing of history textbooks invariably attracts considerable attention for various reasons. The new NCERT textbooks in

history have been prepared adhering strictly to the parameter of giving an objective account of historical events. The latest researches and interpretations in the field have been incorporated.

The NCERT is grateful to Professor Makkhan Lal, an internationally known historian and archaeologist for preparing the present volume. We are also grateful to all those who have helped him in the preparation and production of the book.

The NCERT welcomes suggestions from professional educationists as well as from parents and students which would help to improve the book.

J.S. RAJPUT
Director
National Council of Educational
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New Delhi
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GANDHIJI'S TALISMAN

"I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test :

Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it ? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny ? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions ?

Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away."

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CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

Part IV A

Fundamental Duties of Citizens

ARTICLE 51A

Fundamental Duties – It shall be the duty of every citizen of India —

(a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;

(b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;

(c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India;

(d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;

(e) To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;

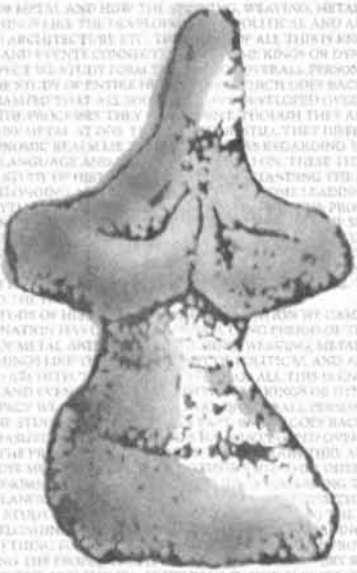
(f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;

(g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, wild life and to have compassion for living creatures;

(h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;

(i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;

(j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement.



CHAPTER 1

THE STUDY OF INDIAN HISTORY

THE various aspects that we study form the part of an overall personality of the society and the people. Therefore, we can say that the study of history is the study of the entire human past, which goes back to millions of years.

KNOWING about one's past is natural to all of us. We are always curious to know as to who were our ancestors i.e. grandfather, great-grandfather and so on; from where did they come, how they lived etc. This is known as the quest for knowing the history of an individual family, which can differ vastly within a single society. But when the study is extended beyond the individual families, to the society, it takes a completely different shape. Then we talk about the entire society and the whole nation. *This quest about knowing the past is known as history.*

Through the study of history of a society or nation we have come to know about the past of that society or nation. We came to know how that society or the nation has developed over a long period of time. Some of these aspects are: how they started agriculture, when they began the use of metal and how spinning, weaving, metalworking developed. With all these economic aspects, also came a whole lot of other things like the development of political and administrative systems, evolution of urban life, development of science and literature and architecture etc. The study of all this is known as history. As you can see, the study of history does not mean just the study of dates and events connected with some kings or dynasties.

The various aspects that we study form the part of an overall personality of the society and the people. Therefore, we can say that the study of history is the study of the entire human past, which goes back to millions of years.

It must be emphasised that all societies have developed over a long period of time but they differ in terms of courses they followed and the processes they underwent. Though they all were stone-age hunter-gatherers, they all practised agriculture, they all began to use metal at one time or other, still they differ in their cultural, social, political and religious identity. It is because beyond the economic realm lie people's ideas regarding their social system, religious practices, political system, art and architecture, language and literature and so on. These things are very individual to each society and nation.

Therefore, the study of history also helps in understanding the people, societies and nations and finally the whole humanity gets a sense of identity and belonging. Many people, including some leading scientists and statesmen, ask, why study history? It does not contribute anything economically. It cannot solve the problem of poverty and unemployment. There is also a perception that it only creates problems and increases animosity among the people. It may be said here that this is a very superficial view. It helps us in knowing people, their culture, their religion, and their social systems, and respecting them. The study of history makes us learn lessons from the past for the present and future. It helps us in not repeating the mistakes which led to various manmade calamities and disasters like wars in the past. History also tells us how to ignore the bad things that created problems in society and follow the things which promote

harmony, peace and prosperity. For example, more than two thousand years back Ashoka, in his Rock Edict XII, insisted on the following measures and practices to maintain harmony, peace and prosperity in society:

"(i) promotion of what constitutes the essence of all religions as their common ground or root (*mula*);

(ii) cultivation of this sense of unity of all religions by the practice of *vachaguti* or restraint of criticism of other religions and sects;

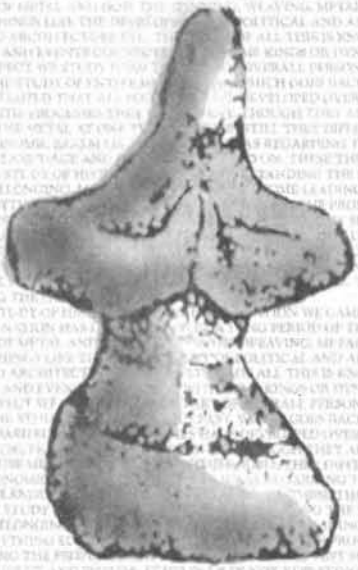
(iii) the coming together (*samavaya*) of exponents of different religions in religious assemblies; and

(iv) learning the texts of other religions so as to become *bahusruta* or proficient in the scriptures of different religions".

History gives people their identity. The study of past does not mean that one lives in the past but one learns to live with the past. History is not something that we can disown.

As mentioned earlier, history gives a society or a nation an identity. On the basis of this study of history, British historian A.L. Basham (1914-1986), in his book, *The Wonder That was India*, writes:

> "At most periods of her history, India, though a cultural unit, has been torn by internecine war. In statecraft her rulers were cunning and unscrupulous. Famine, flood and plague visited her from time to time, and killed millions of her people. Inequality of birth was given religious sanction, and the lot of the humble was generally hard. Yet, our overall impression is that in no other part of the ancient world were the relations of man and man, and of man and the state, so fair and humane. In no other early civilization were slaves so few in number, and in no other ancient law-book are their rights so well protected as in the *Arthashastra*. No other ancient lawgiver proclaimed such noble ideals of fair play in battle as did Manu. In all her history of warfare Hindu India has few tales to tell of cities put to the sword or of the massacre of noncombatants. The ghastly sadism of the kings of Assyria, who flayed their captives alive, is completely without parallel in ancient India. There was sporadic cruelty and oppression no doubt, but, in comparison with conditions in other early cultures, it was mild. To us the most striking feature of ancient Indian civilization is its humanity".



CHAPTER 2

ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY WRITING

ONE of the most interesting aspect of the study of history is knowing the history of history writing itself. It gives you an idea how history changes by the changing interpretation.

Indian Tradition of History Writing

One of the most interesting aspect of the study of history is knowing the history of history writing itself. It gives you an idea how history itself can be moulded by interpretation. How same data and the same evidence get completely different meaning in the hands of different scholars. In this chapter, we are going to learn precisely this aspect of ancient Indian history. We shall study when and how the writing of ancient Indian history began and how it progressed, traversing different paths over a long period of time. Many foreign scholars opined that Indians had no sense of history writing and whatever was written in the name of history is nothing more than a story without any sense. This appears to be a very harsh judgement. To say that Indians had no consciousness about their own history and no sense of writing history is simply incorrect. The knowledge of history was given a very high place in ancient India. It was accorded sanctity equal to a *Veda*. *Atharvaveda*, *Brahmanas* and *Upanishads* include *Itihas-Purana* as one of the branches of knowledge. Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* (fourth century B.C.) advises the king to devote a part of his time everyday for hearing the narrations of history. According to the *Puranas*, following are the subject matters of history: *sarga* (evolution of universe), *pratisarga* (involution of universe), *manvantantar* (recurring of time), *vamsa* (genealogical list of kings and sages), and *vamsanucharita* (life stories of some selected characters).

The Puranic literature is very vast and we have 18 main *Puranas*, 18 subsidiary *Puranas* and a large number of other books. It is interesting to note that in all the *Puranas* royal genealogies are dealt with the reign of Parikshit, the grandson of Arjun, as a benchmark. All the earlier dynasties and kings have been mentioned in past tense. While the latter kings and dynasties have been narrated in future tense. This may be because of the fact that the coronation of Parikshit marks the beginning of Kali Age. Many scholars think that this also points to the fact that perhaps the *Puranas* were completed during the reign of Parikshit.

In the context of the *Puranas* it may be remembered that in ancient India, *Itihas* was looked upon as a means to illuminate the present and future in the light of the past. The purpose of history was to understand and inculcate a sense of duty and sacrifice by individuals to their families, by the families to their clans, by the clans to their villages and by the villages to Janapada and Rashtra and ultimately to the whole humanity. History was not meant to be an exhaustive compendium of the names of the kings and dynasties and their achievements etc. It was treated as a powerful vehicle of awakening of cultural and social consciousness. It was perhaps, for this reason that the narration of *Puranas* were a part of the annual ritual in every village and town during the rainy season and at the time of festivals. The *Puranas* may not satisfy the modern

definition of historiography or those who wrote it may not have been aware of the "historian's crafts", but they were fully aware of the purpose of their work and the purpose of history itself.

Many historians like F.E. Pargitar and H.C. Raychaudhury have attempted to write history on the basis of genealogies of various dynasties given in *Puranas*. The Greek ambassador Megasthenese (in the court of Chandragupta Maurya *c.* 324-300 B.C.) testifies the existence of a list of 153 kings whose reigns had covered a period of about 6053 years uptill then.

Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* is another work of history which is indeed a solitary example of its kind. It enjoys great respect among the historians for its approach and historical content.

Early Foreigners

When we look at the writings on history of ancient India beyond the Indian frontiers, we find that earliest attempts were those of Greek writers. Most notable are Herodotus, Nearchus, Megasthenese, Plutarch, Arrian, Strabo, Pliny the Elder, and Ptolemy. However, except for Megasthenese all others have touched Indian history in the true sense very marginally. They were concerned mostly with the north-western part of India and primarily the areas which were either part of the Persian and Greek Satrapies or Alexander's campaign. Megasthenese wrote extensively in a book called '*Indica*' which is no longer available to us. We know about Megasthenese's writings through various extracts in the writings of Diodorous, Strabo and Arrian. It is very clear that Megasthenese had little understanding of Indian society and social systems. For example, he mentions that Indian society comprised of seven castes (jatis).

The discrepancies in Megasthenese's works seem to be because of his lack of knowledge of any Indian language and being not part of Indian society and psyche. It is surprising that intensive trade relation with India during the first few centuries of the Christian era left such few traces in the Indian literary tradition of the period.

Next important phase of historiography begins with Al-Beruni, who was born in central Asia in A.D. 973 and died in Ghazni (present-day Afghanistan) in A.D.1048 . He was one of the greatest scholars of his time and a contemporary of Mahmud of Ghazni. When Mahmud conquered part of central Asia, he took Al-Beruni with him. Though Al-Beruni deplored his loss of freedom, he appreciated the favourable circumstances for his work. Unlike Megasthenese, Al-Beruni studied Sanskrit language and tried to gain a precise knowledge of Indian sources. The list of works consulted by him is long and impressive. His observations range from philosophy, religion, culture, society to science, literature, art and medicine. Al-Beruni's work can be termed as fairly objective and wherever he has faltered is not because of any other reason but his lack of proper understanding. Al-Beruni can be credited to be

comparatively free from religious or racial biases, we so often encounter in the writing of his successor Muslim and European writers. However, sometime Al-Beruni does show his annoyance when he says sarcastically, "... the Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no religion like theirs, no science like theirs".

Christian Missionaries and Enlightenment

The next phase of historiography belongs to the European interest mainly the Christian Missionaries. A large number of works were produced on India but none of them compared to the works of Al-Beruni. While Al-Beruni also possess a well defined religious and hermeneutics awareness, he was essentially a scholar and not driven to preach his faith. Most of the missionary, writings can hardly be said to be fair. They were more interested in learning and writing about Indian history in order to depict its flaws and prepare the ground for evangelical activity. Their contributions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are also affected by the religious, intellectual and political movements in Europe. However, it must be pointed out that all this led not only to the accumulation of large amount of contributions about Indian history but also Indian history became the victim of political and religious problems of Europe.

With the coming of Enlightenment another phase of European historiography on India begins. Many scholars like John Holwell, Nanthaniel Halhed, and Alexander Dow – all associated in various capacities with the British East India Company – wrote about Indian history and culture proving the pre-eminence of Indian civilization in the ancient world.

On the basis of Puranic sources, they also described the immense antiquity of human race. Holwell wrote that Hindu texts contained a higher revelation than the Christian one and they pre-dated the flood described in the Old Testament and that, "the mythology, as well as cosmogony of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, were borrowed from the doctrines of the Brahmins". Halhed also critically examined the various aspects of Indian history, religion, mythology etc. He discussed the vast periods of time of human history assigned to four *Yugas* and concluded that human reason can no more reconcile to itself the idea of Patriarchal longevity of few thousand years for the entire span of human race. Based on the huge amount of literature produced in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, many scholars and intellectuals who had never travelled to India wrote about it. The great intellectual and statesman, Voltaire viewed India as the homeland of religion in its oldest and purest form; and also as the cradle of worldly civilizations. Voltaire was convinced of the priority of Indian achievement in the area of secular learning and worldly culture. He describes Indians as the people, "to

whom we owe our numbers, our backgammon, our chess, our first principles of geometry and fables which have become our own." He further wrote, "In short I am convinced that everything – astronomy, astrology, metaphysics, etc. – comes to us from the bank of Ganges".

The French naturalist and traveller Pierre de Sonnerate also believed that all knowledge came from India which he considered as the cradle of civilizations. In 1807 the well known metaphysician Schelling wrote, "what is Europe really but a sterile trunk which owes everything to oriental grafts?" The great philosopher Emannual Kant also acknowledged greatness of ancient Indian culture and civilization. He wrote, "Their religion has a great purity ... (and) one can find traces of pure concept of divinity which cannot easily be found elsewhere". He also declared that Indian religious thoughts were free of dogmatism and intolerance.

Imperialist Historiography

We have earlier mentioned about the missionary activities in India and their interest, in writing Indian history. Besides the colonial interests the establishment of Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 also contributed towards the writing of Indian History in its own way. However, it must be mentioned at this stage itself that much of these writings reflect the contemporary debate on religious faith and nationality and also their interests in enlarging the European colonies for economic exploitation. Some of the leading intellectuals of the nineteenth century trading of this path are William Jones, Max Muller, Monier Williams, J.S. Mill, Karl Marx and F.W. Hegel. The most prominent among the twentieth century historians belonging to this school of thought was Vincent Arthur Smith (1843-1920) who prepared the first systematic history of ancient India published in 1904.

A large section of the European scholars became worried when the greatness of India's past started becoming popular and the Indian philosophy, logic and writings on such things as origin of universe, humanity and its age etc. started gaining acceptance. For well over a millennium much of the Europe had accepted the Old Testament as the final testament documenting the history of human race. Thomas Maurice, for example, was bitterly upset and wrote in 1812 about, "the daring assumptions of certain sceptical French philosophers with respect to the Age of the world ... argument principally founded on the high assumptions of the Brahmins... (which) have a direct tendency to overturn the Mosaic system, and, with it, Christianity". These people were also very worried about the *Bible* story of Creation. Bishop Usher had calculated that the whole universe was created at 9.00 a.m. on 23rd October 4004 B.C. and the Great Flood took place in 2349 B.C. These dates and creation stories were being threatened to be wrong in the face of Indian mythologies which talked in terms of four *Yugas* and several

hundred million years. This threatened the very foundation of the faith.

However, the faithful were relieved by "the fortunate arrival of... the various dissertations, on the subject, of Sir William Jones". On his own part, Sir William Jones concern was second to none. He wrote in 1788, "some intelligent and virtuous persons are inclined to doubt the authenticity of the accounts delivered by Moses". Jones too was very clear that, "either the first eleven chapters of Genesis... are true or the whole fabric of our national religion is false, a conclusion which none of us, I trust, would wish to be drawn".

In view of the growing concern of the faithful, Boden Professorships of Sanskrit at Oxford University was endowed by Colonel Boden, specifically to promote the Sanskrit learning among the English, so as "to enable his countrymen to proceed in the conversion of the natives of India to the Christian religion". Prizes were offered to the literary works undermining Indian tradition and religion. The first occupant of the Boden Chair was Horace Hayman Wilson. Writing about a series of lectures he gave, Wilson himself noted that, "these lectures were written to help candidates for a prize of £ 200 given by John Muir... for the best refutation of the Hindu religious systems".

Friedrich Max Muller is considered as one of the most respected Indologists of the nineteenth century. He was a German but spent most of his life in England. On the request and financial support of the British East India Company he undertook massive jobs of translation and interpretation of the Indian religious texts in English. Though he achieved an unparalleled feat of getting translated a huge mass of Sanskrit texts into English, thereby, bringing it to the knowledge of the English speaking world, his approach and intention were never free from prejudice. They were necessitated by his religious belief and political requirements. Both these coloured the entire approach for the writing and interpretation of Indian history.

In 1857 Max Muller wrote to the Duke of Argyll, "I look upon the creation given in the Genesis as simply historical". Therefore, in terms of time span all he had was 6000 years i.e. upto 4000 B.C. within which entire history of universe had to be fitted. It was under this guiding principle William Jones, Max Muller, Vincent Smith and others wrote Indian history.

Eager to settle the matter first, William Jones undertook the responsibility of unravelling Indian chronology for the benefit and appeasement of his disconcerted colleagues, " I propose to lay before you a concise history of Indian chronology extracted from Sanskrit books, attached to no system, and as much disposed to reject Mosoick history, if it be proved erroneous, as to believe it, if it be confirmed by sound reason from indubitable evidence". Despite such assurances, Jone's own predispositions on this matter was revealed in several earlier writings. For

example in 1788 he wrote, "I am obliged of course to believe the sanctity of venerable books [of Genesis]". In 1790 Jones concluded his researches by claiming to have "traced the foundation of the Indian empire above three thousand eight hundred years from now", that is to say, safely within the confines of Bishop Usher's creation date of 4004 B.C. and, more important, within the parameters of the Great Flood, which Jones considered to have occurred in 2350 B.C. Same was the constraint with Max Muller when the question of chronology of Sanskrit literature came up. Lacking any firm basis of his own and rejecting every Indian evidence, he arbitrarily dated the entire Sanskrit literature taking the earliest i.e. *RigVeda* to be of 1500 B.C., once again within the safe limits of Genesis chronology.

Such efforts on the part of European scholars, chiefly British, brought some relief and made this new approach safe for Christianity and its faithful followers. Assessing the impact of such works, mainly of Jones, Trautmann writes (1997), "Jones in effect showed that Sanskrit literature was not an enemy but an ally of the *Bible*, supplying independent corroboration of *Bible*'s version of history. Jone's chronological researches did manage to calm the waters somewhat and effectively guaranteed that the new admiration for Hinduism would reinforce Christianity and would not work for its overthrow".

Thus, the fate of Indian history now got intertwined with the safety and pleasure of Christianity. The culmination of the objectives and the results of the efforts of great European scholars of Indology is seen in private correspondence. Max Muller, writes to his wife of his monumental work of editing 50 vols. of *Sacred Books of the East*, "... this edition of mine and the translation of *Veda*, will herein after tel a great extent on the fate of India and on the growth of millions of souls in that country. It is the root of their religion and to show them what the root is, feel sure, is the only way of uprooting all that has sprung from it during the last three thousand years". Two years after this, Max Muller wrote in 1868 to the Duke of Argyll, then Secretary of State for India, "The ancient religion of India is doomed, and if Christianity does not step in, whose fault will it be?"

Max Muller was not alone in this type of writing history and desiring to uproot all Indian tradition from the soil. Monier-Williams, famous for his *Sanskrit- English* and *English-Sanskrit* dictionaries, and a Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, wrote in 1879, "... when the walls of the mighty fortress of Brahmanism [Hinduism] are encircled, undermined and finally stormed by the soldier of the Cross, the victory of Christianity must be single and complete".

Thus, we can safely say that most of the works done on Indian history during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were perforce guided by the preconditions imposed by the belief in the Genesis and to counter all the writing that were projecting India's

past in terms of great civilization and Indian philosophy and thoughts indicating great antiquity for the origins of universe and human beings.

As mentioned earlier, another factor which contributed to the distortion of ancient Indian history was the British imperial interests in India. By 1804 we find a marked shift in British attitude towards India. After the defeat of French forces in the hands of British and weakened Maratha power, the British were sure of their rule over India. However, they were worried of the fact that British civilians coming to India were getting Brahmanised and developing inferiority complex. To overcome this problem and to inculcate a sense of superiority complex among the British officers about western culture they adopted a two pronged strategy. First and the most important was the one initiated by the Utilitarian school led by James Mill who wrote six volumes on history of India between 1806 and 1818, without ever visiting India or knowing any Indian language. In it he divided Indian history into three periods – first Hindu Period, second Muslim Period and third British Period – without any logic and justification. He presented an extremely denigrading picture of Hindu periods. He condemned every institution, idea and action of the Hindu period and held Hindus responsible for all the ills of the country. This book was introduced as a text book in the Harleybury school in England which was established to educate the young Englishmen coming to India as administrators and civil servants. James Mill, his son John Stuart Mill, and his disciple Thomas Macauley played a very important role in shaping the imperialist policy in India and the future of Indian education in the core of which was the distorted history of ancient India.

Following in the footsteps of James Mill, V.A. Smith an ICS officer serving the British Government in India, prepared the text book called *Early History of India* in 1904. As a loyal member of the civil service he emphasized the role of foreigners in ancient India. Alexander's invasion accounted for almost one-third of his book. Smith's racial arrogance is obvious when he writes, "The triumphant progress of Alexander from the Himalayas to the sea demonstrated the inherent weakness of the greatest Asiatic armies when confronted with European skill and discipline". V.A. Smith gives the impression as if Alexander had conquered whole of India from Himalayas to seas while the fact is he only touched the north-western borders of India and as we shall see in relevant chapter, it was a virtual non-event. Smith presented India as a land of despotism which did not experience political unity until the establishment of British rule. He observed, "Autocracy is substantially the only form of government with which the historians of India are concerned".

The whole approach of Imperial historians has been best summed up by historian R.S. Sharma. He observes, "British interpretations of Indian

history served to denigrate Indian character and achievements, and justify the colonial rule... However, the generalisations made by historians were either false or grossly exaggerated. They could serve as good propaganda material for the perpetuation of the despotic British rule. ... At the heart of all such generalisations lay the need of demonstrating that Indians were incapable of governing themselves".

tionalist Approach

The difference of opinion and different interpretations on the same evidence is not only respected but also considered essential for the healthy development of the academic world. But the difference of opinion is quite different regarding the distortion of ones past history. The educated intelligentsia of the nineteenth century was horrified at the distortions of the ancient Indian history. In the late nineteenth century some scholars like Rajendra Lal Mitra, R.G. Bhandarkar, and V.K. Rajwade tried to look at the ancient Indian history from the Indian point of view. Both Bhandarkar and Rajwade worked on the history of Maharashtra region and reconstructed the social, political and economic history of the area.

However, the real impetus and challenge to the imperialist version of history came in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Some of the most notable historians of this period are D.R. Bhandarkar, H.C. Raychaudhary, R.C. Majumdar, P.V. Kane, A.S. Altekar, K.P. Jayaswal, K.A. Nilakant Sastri, T.V. Mahalingam, H.C. Ray and R.K. Mookerji. D.R. Bhandarkar (1875-1950) reconstructed the history of ancient India on the basis of epigraphic and numismatic evidence. His books on Ashoka and on ancient Indian polity helped in clearing many myths created by imperialist historians. The biggest blow to the imperialist school in the realm of political ideas and institutions was given by K.P. Jayaswal (1881-1937). In his book *Hindu Polity*, published in 1924, Jayaswal effectively knocked down the myth that Indians had no political ideas and institutions. His study of literary and epigraphical sources showed that India was not a despotic country as propagated by the imperialist historians. Beside the hereditary kingship, India had the tradition of republics right from RigVedic times. He also convincingly showed that contrary to the views of British historians, Indian polity and art of governance was far more developed than that of any other part of contemporary world. His book *Hindu Polity* is considered as one of the most important book ever written on ancient Indian history.

H.C. Raychaudhury (1892-1957) in his book *Political History of Ancient India* reconstructed the history of ancient India from the time of Mahabharata war to the time of Gupta empire and practically cleared the clouds created by V.A. Smith. R.C. Majumdar is considered as the doyen among Indian historians. He was one of the most prolific writers and has written on almost every aspect of Indian

History. He wrote a large number of books covering the time period from Ancient India to the freedom struggle. The publication of *History and Culture of the Indian People* in eleven volumes under his general editorship is one of the most outstanding achievements. This multi-volume series deals with Indian history and civilization right from the prehistoric times to the India's independence in 1947 and remains a singular reference work.

K.A. Nilakant Sastri (1892-1975) contributed immensely towards the understanding of South Indian history. His books like *A History of Ancient India* and *A History of South India* are the shining examples of brilliant scholarship. R.K. Mookerji (1886-1964) was perhaps one of most outstanding writers when it came to expressing even the most difficult subjects in simple terms. His books like *Hindu Civilization, Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka* and *Fundamental Unity of India* put the cultural, economic and political history of India not only on firm ground but also made it accessible even to a lay reader. P.V. Kane (1880-1972) was a great Sanskritist. His monumental work entitled *History of Dharmasastra* in five volumes running into over six thousand pages is an encyclopaedia of social, religious and political laws and customs.

The contributions of all these great scholars helped in clearing the mist built by the missionaries and the imperialist historians.

Marxist School of History

The Marxist school of historiography used to be the most influential school of history in the second half of the last century. Despite the inherent contradiction and total failure of Marxist model of history writings it is academically important to discuss it and give respect to the contributions it has made.

The Marxists believe in universal laws and stages of history. They believe that all the societies pass through at least five stages of history – (i) Primitive Communism (ii) Slavery (iii) Feudalism (iv) Capitalism and (v) Communism.

These stages were defined by Karl Marx and F. Engels, the propounders of Communism. They clearly acknowledged their intellectual debt to F.W. Hegel and Lewis Henry Morgan. It must be mentioned here that the stages of history proposed by Marx and Engels was based on their understanding of European history. Before we come to Indian Marxist historiography it is important to know as to what Hegel and Marx said about Indian history and civilization.

G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) was a great western philosopher. Hegel was not an Indologist and made no attempt to learn Sanskrit or any other Indian language. He made use of translations, reports etc. His writings on Indian history and philosophy were based mainly on the writings of William Jones, James Mill and other British writers whose approach to ancient Indian history has already been discussed in detail. The results were indeed disastrous.

In the beginning Hegel felt that India, as the Orient in general, has to be excluded from the history of philosophy. However, in the light of several writings though Hegel reluctantly accepted that India had a philosophical system and its history had great antiquity, he explicitly considered it to be inferior to that of the Greeks and the Romans. Even his contemporary European scholars were appauled at his conclusions about Indian history and philosophy. He was seen by them as a "prototype of Westerner" who saw western thoughts as a measure of all things: "Therefore, whatever he had to say about the Indian world, turned out to be very insufficient; and the result was a caricature which shows... that he ventured on a task for which he was not qualified..." Despite such shortcomings Hegel's influence is not confined to Europe alone. In India also there is a significant tradition of "Hegelianism"; "Neo-Hegelianism" and "Anti-Hegelianism".

Similarly, Marx was also very superficial in his knowledge about India and not really free from racial considerations. Most of what Marx had to say about India is found in newspaper articles. Marx took his lead from Hegel. Marx was a great votary of India being enslaved by British and dismissed India as a backward and uncivilized nation with no history. In 1853 he wrote, "India, then could not escape being conquered, and the whole of her past history, if it be anything, is the history of the successive conquests she has undergone. Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society...".

The Hegelian and Marxian approach to Indian history by and large remained dormant for a long time. It was largely non-existent during the British rule in India. After the independence of India, the Marxist school of historiography became one of the most influential and dominant schools. Following Marx's scheme, the history of India also came to be re-written. Consequently, primitive communism, slavery, feudalism and capitalism i.e. the various stages of history propounded by Marx and Engels came to be applied in Indian History also. This school also, like the imperialist school, does not find anything good with Indian civilization. Like Marx, they feel that all that is good in Indian civilization is the contribution of conquerors and that is why, according to this school, the Kushana period is the golden period and not the Satavahanas or Guptas. The period from the Gupta's to the conquest of Muslims in the twelfth century A.D. has been termed as the "Period of Feudalism" i.e. "Dark Age" during which every thing degenerated. This has been despite the fact that, irrespective of political upheaval, there was an all round development in the fields of literature, sciences, art, architecture, economy etc. Also when it came to literary evidence and its chronology, they largely follow Max Muller and other British historians.

Indian Marxist historians lay great emphasis on economic interpretation of all social and religious ideas, customs and institutions. Being allergic to religion and spirituality their irreverence for saints and sages is too obvious. However, it must be mentioned that their writings, nevertheless, have contributed immensely towards the understanding of various aspects of Indian history which had remained ignored earlier.

D.D. Kosambi can be called the first among the pioneers of this school of thought. D.R. Chanana, R.S. Sharma, Romila Thaper, Irfan Habib, Bipan Chandra, and Satish Chandra are some of the leading Marxist historians of India.

In the Marxist scheme of history Marxism is an ideal philosophy and polity and the Soviet Union was the ideal state. Since the break-up of Soviet Union and almost the total eclipse of Marxian polity and economy, the historians are finding it difficult to explain the reasons for the collapse. It is perhaps this phenomenon which has contributed to the loss of lustre in the Marxist historiography.

Multi-disciplinary Approach

In the last ten years due to the huge accumulation of data from various disciplines like archaeology, palaeontology, anthropology, astronomy and space research, there has been renewed interest in studying the ancient Indian history. Many scholars have broken the shackles of the old mould and have been looking at ancient Indian history in the light of data obtained from different disciplines. This is known as the multidisciplinary approach, examples of which will be seen in the following chapters.

Exercises

1. Explain the following:
   Vamsanucharita, Manvantantar, Sarga, Pratisarga, Yuga, Kalpa.
2. Write short notes on:
   (i) Importance of History
   (ii) Multi-disciplinary Approach
   (iii) Biblical Concept of Creation
3. Describe the Indian tradition of history writing.
4. Write a note on the foreign travellers who visited India from the fourth century B.C to the tenth century A.D. and what they wrote about India?
5. What were the views of the Christian missionaries about India?
6. Describe the Imperialist school of Historiography and their approach towards the writing of Indian history.
7. Describe the Nationalist school of Historiography. How was it different from the Imperialist approach?
8. Define the Marxist school of history and their approach to Indian history.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOURCES OF ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY

BROADLY the sources for ancient India's history can be classified under two main categories. The first is the literary and the second archaeological. Under the literary sources can be included Vedic, Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and other literature besides foreign accounts.

WE have a variety of sources for reconstructing the history of ancient India. Broadly, the sources for ancient India's history can be classified under two main categories. The first is the literary and the second archaeological. Under the literary sources can be included Vedic, Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and other literature besides foreign accounts. Under the broad head of archaeology we may consider epigraphic, numismatic and architectural remains besides archaeological explorations and excavations which have opened great vistas of new information about which we had no knowledge earlier.

Literary Sources

There has been much debate about the reliability of ancient Indian literature for the history of India. It revolves around the opinion that most of the ancient literature is religious in nature, and those which are claimed to be history by Indians, i.e., puranic and epic literature, contain no definite dates for events and kings. A large number of inscriptions, coins and local chronicles do indicate an effort towards history writing. The rudiments of history are preserved in the *Puranas* and epics. We find genealogies of kings and sometimes their achievements. But it is difficult to arrange them in chronological order.

Vedic literature, mainly the four *Vedas* i.e. *Rik*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva Vedas*, are entirely in a different language, which can be called the Vedic language. Its vocabulary contains a wide range of meaning and at times different in grammatical usages. It has a definite mode of pronunciation in which emphasis changes the meaning entirely. This is the reason why an elaborate means to protect and preserve the mode of pronunciation of the *Vedas* have been devised. By the means of *Ghana*, *Jata* and other types of *pathas* we can not only determine the meaning of the *mantras* but also can hear the original tone on which these were sung thousands of years ago. It is on account of these *pathas* no interpolations in the *Vedas* are possible. However, we cannot find much trace of political history in the *Vedas*, but can have reliable glimpses of the culture and civilization of the Vedic period.

Six *vedangas* (limbs of *Vedas*) were evolved for the proper understanding of the *Vedas*. These are *Siksha* (phonetics), *Kalpa* (rituals), *Vyakarna* (grammar), *Nirukta* (etymology), *Chhanda* (metrics), and *Jyotisha* (astronomy). Each *vedanga* has developed a credible literature around it which are in the *sutra* form i.e., precepts. This is a very precise and exact form of expression in prose which was developed by the ancient Indians. Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, book on grammar in eight chapters is the final culmination of this excellent art of writing in *sutra* (precepts) in which every chapter is precisely interwoven.

Besides the *Vedas*, the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads* are also included in the vedic literature and are known as the later vedic literature. The *Brahmanas* elaborate

vedic rituals and the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads* give discourses on different spiritual and philosophical problems.

The *Puranas*, eighteen in number, are mainly historical accounts. Five branches of historical studies are considered to form the subject matter of the *Puranas*. These are (i) *sarga* (evolution of universe), (ii) *pratisarga* (involution of universe), (iii) *manvantantra* (recurring of time), (iv) *vamsa* (genealogical list of kings and sages), and (v) *vamsanucharita* (life stories of some selected characters). Later on description of the *tirthas* (sacred places of pilgrimage) and their *mahatmya* (religious importance) was also included in it. The two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, may also be used as a source. It is generally held that there have been constant interpolations in these works.

The Jain and the Buddhist literature were written in Prakrit and Pali languages. Prakrit was a form of Sanskrit language and early Jain literature is mostly written in this language. Pali can be regarded as the form of Prakrit language which was in vogue in Magadha. Most of the early Buddhist literature is written in this language. With the Buddhist monks it reached Sri Lanka, where it is a living language. Ashokan edicts are also in this language. Since the modern historians have discarded most of the dynasties mentioned in the *Puranas* and Mahavira and Buddha are considered historical personalities, only those portions of the puranic dynastic lists have been accepted which are supplemented and supported by the Buddhist and Jaina literature. The Buddhist books, called, *Jataka* stories also are given some historical importance, as they are related with the previous births of the Buddha. There are more than 550 such stories. The Jaina literature also contains same information which may help us in reconstructing the history of different regions of India.

The *Dharmasutras* and the *Smritis*, are rules and regulations for the general public and the rulers. It can be termed in the modern concept as the constitution and the law books for the ancient Indian polity and society. These are also called *Dharmashastras*. These were compiled between 600 and 200 B.C. *Manusmriti* is prominent among them. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, a book on statecraft was written in the Maurya period. The text is divided into 15 chapters known as books. Different books deal with different subject matter concerning polity, economy and society. It appears that even before the final version of *Arthashastra* was written in the fourth century B.C. by Kautilya, there appeared a tradition of writing on and teaching of statecrafts because Kautilya acknowledges his debt to his predecessors in the field. *Mudrarakshasha*, a play written by Vishakhadatta, also gives a glimpse of society and culture.

Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitram* is based on some events of the reign of Pusyamitra Sunga, a dynasty which

followed the Mauryas. Bhasa and Sudraka are other poets who have written plays based on historical events. Banabhatta's *Harshacharita* throws light on many historical facts about which we could not have known otherwise. Vakpati wrote *Gaudavaho*, based on the exploits of Yasovarman of Kanauj. Similarly, Bilhana's *Vikramankadevacharita* describes the victories of the later Chalukya king Vikramaditya. There are some other biographical works based on the lives of different kings. Prominent among these are: *Kumarapalacharita* of Jayasimha, *Kumarapalacharita* or *Dvayashraya Mahakavya* of Hemachandra, *Hammirakavya* of Nayachandra, *Navasahasankacharita* of Padmagupta, *Bhojaprabandha* of Billal, *Prithvirajacharit* of Chandbardai.

But the historical text, *Rajatarangini* by Kalhana is the best illustration of history writing appreciated by modern historians. His critical method of historical research and impartial treatment of the historical facts have earned him a great respect among the modern historians.

The *Sangam* literature, describes many kings and dynasties of South India. Poetic compilations by group of poets of different times patronised by many chiefs and kings are, called *Sangama*. These are, in all, 30,000 lines of poetry arranged in two main groups, *Patinenkilkanakku* and the *Pattupattu*. The former is older than the latter. The *Sangam* literature consists of short and long poems which were composed by a large number of poets in praise of their kings. Some kings and events are supported by inscriptions also. This literature generally describes events upto the fourth century A.D.

Foreign Accounts

For a great deal of our knowledge of ancient Indian history we are indebted to the foreigners. India figures in the foreign inscriptions like in those of Darius. Herodotus and Ctesian got their information through the Persian sources. Herodotus in his "Histories" gives us much information about Indo-Persian relations. Arrian wrote a detailed account of the invasion of India by Alexander on the basis of information from those who accompanied the campaign. Ambassadors were sent to Pataliputra by Greek kings. Some of them were Megasthenese, Deimachus and Dionysios. Megasthenese was in the court of Chandragupta Maurya. He wrote a book on India called *Indica*. The original work has been lost but we have some idea about it from the quotations in the works of the later writers. An anonymous author, who was a Greek, settled in Egypt wrote a book *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, on the basis of his personal voyage of Indian coast in about A.D. 80. He gives valuable information about the Indian coasts. Another writer Ptolemy wrote a geographical treatise on India in the second century A.D. Most of the Greek writing about India are based on secondary sources resulting in numerous errors and, contradictions. Therefore, it is necessary to be cautious

when using Greek sources. They were ignorant of the language and the customs of the country and their information is full of unbelievable facts and fancies. The works of Megasthenese and so also of those who accompanied Alexander have been lost and are available only in fragments as quoted in later works.

Chinese travellers visited India from time to time. They came here as Buddhist pilgrims and therefore their accounts are somewhat tilted towards Buddhism. Chinese tradition has preserved a long list of such pilgrims. Three of these pilgrims namely, Fa-Hien visited India in fifth century A.D. while Hiuen-Tsang and I-tsing came in seventh century. They have left fairly detailed accounts which have been translated in English. Hiuen-Tsang has given the most interesting and valuable account about Harshavardhana and some other contemporary kings of Northern India. Fa-Hien and Hiuen-Tsang travelled many parts of the country. However, they have given somewhat exaggerated account of Buddhism during the period of their visit. For example Hiuen-Tsang depicts Harsha as a follower of Buddhism while in his epigraphic records Harsha mentions himself as a devotee of Siva. But considering the fact that Indian rulers always have, like their subjects, been multi-religious people, it is not difficult for a foreigner to be confused.

Some Arabs also have left their accounts about India. Most famous among these are Abu Rihan better known as Al-Beruni, a contemporary of Mahmud of Ghazni. His observations are based on his knowledge of Indian society and culture which he acquired through literature. For this he studied Sanskrit. However, he does not give any political information of his times.

Archaeological Sources

The utilisation of archaeological sources in reconstructing India's past is only about two centuries old. They not only supplemented our knowledge about our past but have also yielded materials which we could not have got otherwise. It was generally held even up to the 1920s that Indian civilization was considered to have begun about sixth century B.C. But with the excavations at Mohenjodaro, Kalibangan and Harappa the antiquity of Indian civilization has gone back to about 5000 B.C. The finds of prehistoric artifacts has shown that human activities had started here as early as about two million years ago.

We have been benefitted much with other branches like epigraphy and numismatics also without which our knowledge about India's past would have been very limited. We could not have known about most of the Indo-Greek, Saka-Parthian and Kushana kings without numismatic sources. Similarly, Ashoka's views on *dharma* and conquests of Samudragupta, and several others would have remained unknown without their epigraphs.

Inscriptions : One of the most important and reliable sources of history writing are inscriptions. An inscription, being

a contemporary document, is free from later interpolations. It comes in the form it was composed in and engraved for the first time. It is almost impossible to add something to it at a later stage. However, in the works written on soft materials like birch bark, palm leaf, paper etc., this can not be said to be true because they were frequently required to be copied, since the old manuscripts become fragile in course of time. At the time of copying, some errors tend to creep in or sometimes even additions are made. This is not possible with inscriptions. The study of inscriptions is called epigraphy.

The script of the inscriptions also helps the historian in many ways. The earliest system of writings is found in the Harappan seals. However, there has been no success in deciphering it. Thus, the writing system of the Ashokan inscriptions are considered to be the earliest. These are found written in four scripts. In his empire in Afghanistan he used Aramaic and Greek scripts for his edicts. In the Pakistan region Kharoshthi script was used. Kharoshthi evolved on the *Varnamala* system of the Indian languages is written from right to left.

The Brahmi script was used for the rest of his empire from Kalsi in the north in Uttaranchal upto Mysore in the south. After Ashoka it was adopted by the rulers of the succeeding centuries. The most interesting thing about the Brahmi script is that its individual letters were modified century after century and through this process all the scripts of India, including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam in the south and Nagari, Gujarati, Bangla, etc. in the north have developed from it. This modification in the form of individual letters gave another advantage. It has made it roughly possible to ascertain the time or the century in which the inscription was written. A study of development of scripts is called palaeography.

However, with the passage of time, the Indians had lost interest in their ancient scripts and therefore, had virtually forgotten a large portion of written history. When the epigraphic studies started in the late eighteenth century, inscriptions only belonging upto the tenth century A.D. could be read with some difficulty. But the decipherment of earlier epigraphs was not easy. Some western scholars prepared alphabetic tables meticulously. But credit to complete the chart of Ashokan alphabets goes to James Prinsep who did it in 1837. After this the study of epigraphs became a subject in itself. India is particularly rich in epigraphic material.

The inscriptions of Ashoka are a class in itself. These were recorded in different years of his reign and are called edicts because they are in the form of the king's order or desire. They also give a glimpse of Ashoka's image and personality as a benevolent king concerned with the welfare of not only his subjects but also of the whole humanity.

Inscriptions of the Indo-Greeks, Saka-kshatrapas and Kushanas adopt Indian names within two or three

generations. These inscriptions show them engaged in social and religious welfare activities like any other Indian.

Sanskrit also came to be used in inscriptions. The Junagarh Rock inscription of Rudradaman is considered as an early example of chaste Sanskrit, written in mid second century A.D.

Sanskrit came to occupy a prime place since the Gupta period. The Allahabad Pillar inscription enumerates the achievements of Samudragupta. But for this sole inscription, this great Gupta king would have remained unknown in the history of India. Most of the Gupta epigraphs give genealogy. This became the practice of the subsequent dynasties. They took the opportunity to give an account of their conquests and achievements of their predecessor including mythology of their origins. The Chalukya king Pulkeshin II gives a dynastic genealogy and achievements in his Aihole inscription. Similarly, the Gwalior inscription of Bhoja gives full account of his predecessors and their achievements. From the inscriptions we also came to know about the grant of land, free from all taxes, to the learned brahmans. These are called *Agraharas*.

Coins : The branch of knowledge which studies coins is called numismatics. This is considered as the second most important source for reconstructing the history of India, the first being inscriptions. Several hundred thousands of coins have been found and deposited in different museums of India and abroad. Coins are mostly found in hoards most of which have been found while digging field or excavating foundation for the construction of a building, making road etc. Coins found in systematic excavations are less in number but are very valuable because their chronology and cultural context can be fixed precisely.

Earliest coins, called punch-marked, are in silver and copper. Some gold punch-marked coins are also reported to have been found, but they are very rare and their authenticity is doubtful. Then come the Indo-Greek coins also in silver and copper and rarely in gold. The Kushanas issued their coins mostly in gold and copper, rarely in silver. The imperial Guptas issued mostly gold and silver coins but the gold coins are numerous.

The punch-marked coins are the earliest coins of India and they bear only symbols on them. Each symbol is punched separately, which sometimes overlap the another. These have been found throughout the country, from Taxila to Magadha to Mysore or even further south. They do not bear any inscription, or legend on them.

The Indo-Greek coins show beautiful artistic features on them. The portrait or bust of the king on the observe side appear to be real portraits. On the reverse some deity is depicted. It is through the coins alone we know that more than forty Indo-Greek rulers who ruled in a small north-western region of India. We know about several Saka-Parthians kings about whom we would have no information from any

other sources. The Kushanas issued mostly gold coins and numerous copper coins which are found in most parts of north India up to Bihar. Indian influence can be seen on them from the very beginning. The coins of Vima Kadphises bear the figure of Siva standing beside a bull. In the legend on these coins the king calls himself *Mahesvara*, i.e. devotee of Siva. Kanishka, Huvishka and Vasudeva etc. all have this depiction on their coins. We find many Indian gods and goddesses depicted on Kushana coins besides many Persian and Greek deities.

The Guptas appear to have succeeded Kushanas in the tradition of minting coins. They completely Indianised their coinage. On the observe kings are depicted engaged in activities like hunting a lion or rhinoceros, holding a bow or battle-axes, playing musical instrument or performing *Ashvamedha yajna.*

Archaeological Monuments, Excavations and Explorations

In addition to epigraphic and numismatic sources there are many other antiquarian remains which speak much about our past. Temples and sculptures are found all over the country right from the Gupta period upto recent times. These show architectural and artistic history of the Indians. They excavated large caves in the hills in Western India which are mostly *chaityas* and *viharas*. Large temples have been carved out of rocks from outside like Kailasa temple of Ellora and *rathas* at Mamallapuram.

In excavations we find a large number of figurines in stone, metal and terracotta which tell us about the artistic activities of the time. The discovery of the cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa which pushed back the antiquity of Indian culture and civilization by two thousand years is well known. The subsequent discovery of sites of Kalibangan. Lothal, Dholavira, Rakhigarhi etc. show the extent of this civilization upto Gujarat, Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The period between 1500 and 600 B.C. was known as the dark period of Indian history because not much was known about this period. The archaeological discoveries of such cultures as Black-and-Red Ware, Painted Grey Ware, Malwa and Jorwe cultures since 1950s have not only filled the chronological gaps but also the geographical extent. It is through archaeological discoveries that we know now that Indians domesticated sheep and goat and started agriculture about 8000 years ago. Also iron came in regular use about 1600 B.C.

Archaeological excavations also brought to light the townships of Taxila, Kausambi, Kasi (Rajghat), Ayodhya, Vaisali, Bodhgaya, etc. belonging to Buddha's time. All of these places except Taxila are said to have been visited by Buddha in the sixth century B.C.

The researches carried out in the field of prehistory show that the human activities started in the subcontinent as early as two million

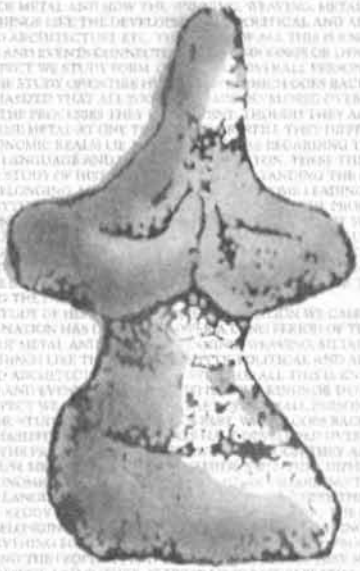
years ago. In the Kashmir and Narmada valleys such remains and tools are reported. Also, archaeological discoveries have shown that tradition of rock paintings in India goes back to more than twelve thousands years.

Exercises

1. Explain the following:
   Epigraphy, Numismatics, Inscriptions, Archaeology, Script, Palaeography, Excavations, Explorations.
2. Write short notes on:
   (i) Six *Vedangas*
   (ii) Archaeological sources of Indian history
   (iii) Buddhist literature
3. Describe the literary sources for the study of the past?
4. What is an Inscription? How are they important for the study of the political, social and economic history of India.
5. Discuss the importance of coins for the study of the past.

Things to Do

- Visit a museum to see the various sources of history and try to identify them.
- Make a collage to show the various sources of history.
- Make posters of some monuments.



Chapter 4

The Geographical Background of Indian History

In ancient times this whole mass of land was known as Bharatavarsha or Hindustan; the latter is derived from the name of the river Sindhu, pronounced by the westerners as Hindu or Indu. India gets its derivation from this. In our constitution it is called India, that is Bharata.

INDIAN subcontinent is a well defined land with natural borders. At present there are six countries in this area: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, India, Bhutan and Bangladesh. In ancient times this whole mass of land was known as Bharatavarsha or Hindustan; the latter is derived from the name of the river Sindhu, pronounced by the westerners as Hindu or Indu. India gets its derivation from this. In our constitution it is called India, that is Bharata.

This land is bordered in the north by the Himalyas, the western and north-western side by Pamir plateau and Sulaiman Kirthar ranges, on the eastern side by the Bay of Bengal and western side by the Arabian Sea. Southern borders are bounded by Indian Ocean.

Physically the subcontinent can be studied in three parts : (i) The Himalayas, (ii) The Indo-Gangetic-Brahmaputra plain (iii) The Deccan plateau.

The Himalayas

The Himalayas are stretched from Afghanistan in the west upto Myanmar in the east. The Tibetan plateau forms the northern part of it. It is more than 2,400 Kms long and about 250 to 320 kms wide. There are about 114 peaks which are more than 20,000 feet high. Some of the highest peaks are : Gauri-Shankar or Everest (the highest mountain in the world), Kanchanjanga, Dhaulagiri, Nanga Parvat and Nanda Devi. The Hindukush mountains, right from the Pamirs, form the natural western boundary of the Indian subcontinent. The mountains of Safed Koh, Sulaiman and Kirthar separate Iran from the Indian subcontinent. 'But the large stretches of land to the west of this line in modern Afghanistan and Baluchistan, like those to the south and east of the Hindukush, were for long both culturally and politically parts of India'.

On the eastern side are the Patkoi hills, Naga hills, the Manipur Plateau including the Khasi, Garo and Jaintia hills. The Lushai and Chin hills are to the south of Manipur.

The Himalayas form a formidable barrier against the foreign invasions from the north. But it is not altogether secluded from the rest of the world. There are some important passes through which interaction with western, central and northern Asia has been maintained since time immemorial. It is said that 'since early Siwalik times there has been a more or less constant intercourse between East Africa, Arabia, Central Asia and India maintained by the migrations of herds of mammals'. It is also stated that (India) 'received large accessions by migration of the larger quadrupeds from Egypt, Arabia, Central Asia, and even from the distant North America by way of land bridges across Alaska, Siberia and Mongolia'. Human migration is also possible on these routes. In historical times the use of the Khyber and Bolan passes in the west is well known. Among these, the use of the former was very frequent and is known as the gateway to India.

Besides guarding the northern frontier of India from human invasions

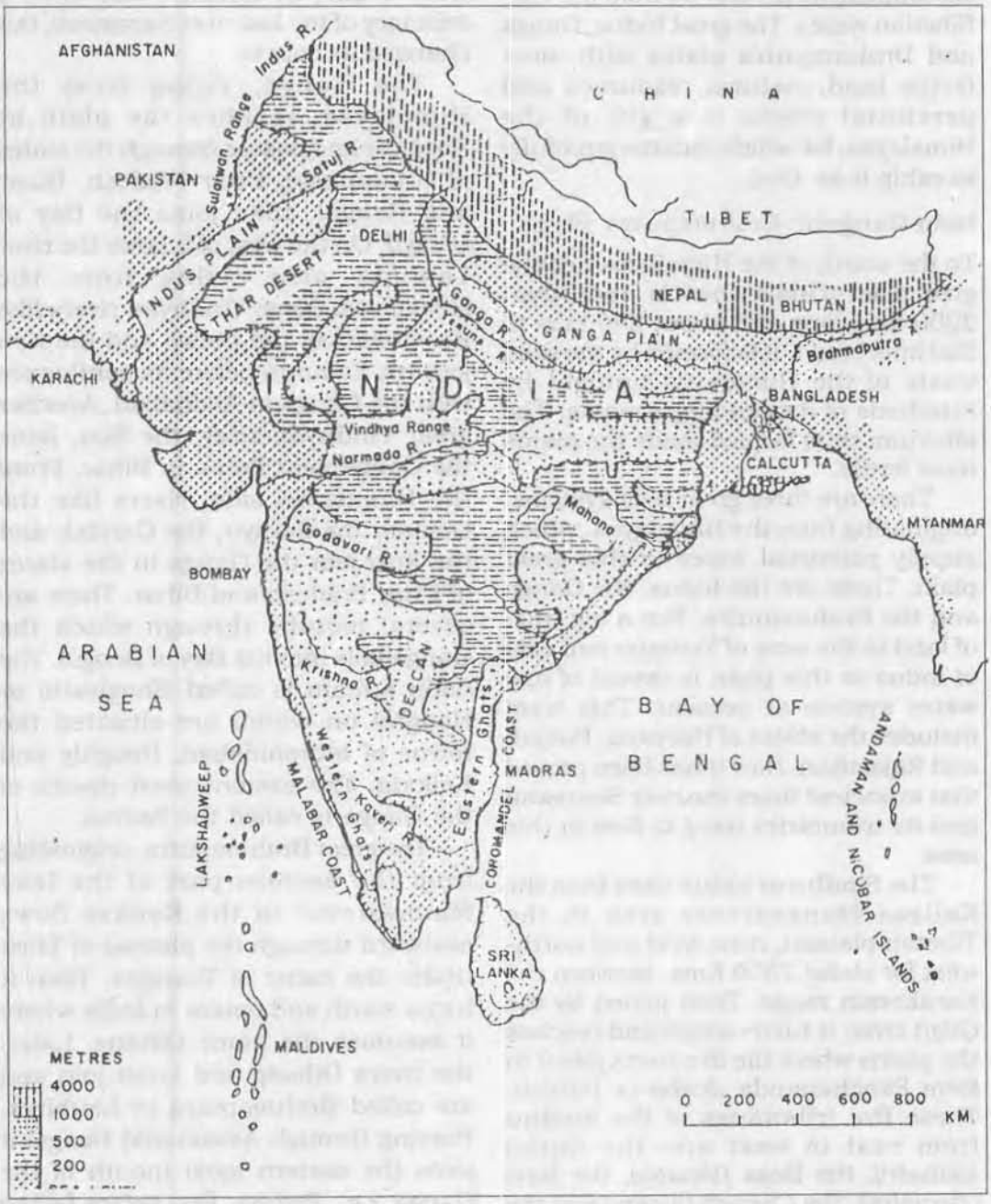


Fig. 4.1 *Physical Map of India*

the Himalayas protect us from the cold Siberian winds. The great Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra plains with most fertile land, natural resources and perennial rivers is a gift of the Himalayas, for which Indians gratefully worship it as God.

Indo-Gangetic-Brahmaputra Plain

To the south of the Himalayas lies the great plain of India which is more than 3200 kms long and about 240 kms to 320 kms broad. It is formed by the solid waste of the Himalayas brought by hundreds of descending streams. The alluvium thus formed made the plains most fertile.

There are three great river systems, originating from the Himalayas, which supply perennial water to this great plain. These are the Indus, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. But a big tract of land to the west of Yamuna and east of Indus in this plain is devoid of any water system at present. This tract includes the states of Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan. Now it has been proved that in ancient times the river Saraswati and its tributaries used to flow in this area.

The Sindhu or Indus rises from the Kailasa Manasarovar area in the Tibetan plateau, runs west and north-west for about 1300 Kms, between the Karakoram range. Then joined by the Gilgit river, it turns south and reaches the plains where the five rivers join it to form Panchananda *desha* or Punjab. These five tributaries of the Sindhu from east to west are: the Sutlej *(Satudri)*, the Beas *(Vipasa)*, the Ravi *(Parushni)*, the Chenab *(Asikni)* and the Jhelum *(Vitesta)*. The first mentioned river, Sutlej or Satudri was once a tributary of the lost river Saraswati, but changed its course.

The Ganga, rising from the Himalayas, reaches the plain at Hardwar and passes through the states of Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal, then joins the Bay of Bengal. On the west of it flows the river Yamuna also rising from the Himalayas. Some Vindhyan rivers like the Chambal, the Betwa and the Ken join the Yamuna before its confluence with the Ganga at Allahabad. Another great Vindhyan river, the Son, joins the Ganga near Patna in Bihar. From the Himalayas side, rivers like the Gomati, the Sarayu, the Gandak and the Kosi join the Ganga in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. There are several mouths through which the Ganga falls into the Bay of Bengal. The main stream is called Bhagirathi or Hooghli on which are situated the towns of Murshidabad, Hooghly and Kolkata. The eastern most mouth of the Ganga is called the Padma.

The great Brahmaputra, originating from the eastern part of the lake Manasarovar in the Kailasa flows eastward through the plateau of Tibet under the name of Tsangpo. Then it turns south and enters in India where it assumes the name Dihang. Later, the rivers Dihang and Luhit join and are called Brahmaputra or Lauhitya. Passing through Assam and Bengal it joins the eastern most mouth of the Ganga, i.e., Padma. But before falling into the Bay of Bengal another mighty

river, the Meghna, joins it. The delta thus formed is one of the most fertile part of Bengal and is known as Sundarban delta.

The Deccan Plateau and Central India

Peninsular India can be studied under two distinct sections. The mountain ranges of the Vindhyas and Satpura run parallel to each other from east to west. In between these two, flows the river Narmada going towards the Arabian sea. The only other river flowing towards west is Tapti, lying a little south of the Satpura. All other rivers of the Peninsula run from west to east falling into the Bay of Bengal indicating that the plateau is titled towards east. The northern portion of the plateau, separated by the Vindhya-Satpura ranges is known as the Central Indian plateau, while the southern portion is called the Deccan plateau.

Central Indian Plateau

The Central Indian plateau stretches from Gujarat in the west to Chhota Nagpur in the east. The great Indian desert, called Thar, lies to the north of the Aravalli range. To the south of it is the Vindhyas, which rises abruptly from the Narmada side, i.e., south, and has a slopy formation in the north. The Malwa plateau and the tablelands of Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand are parts of this. As a result, all the rivers on this side flow towards north or north-east to join the Yamuna and the Ganga. The eastern stretches of the Vindhyas, known as the Kaimur ranges, extend almost up to the south of Banaras and run parallel with the Ganga up to the Rajmahal hills. Between the Ganga and the Rajmahal is a narrow defile or a passage from Chunar in the west (i.e. Mirzapur, U.P.) to Teliagarhi in the east. This is the only high road, which connects Western and Eastern India. Its strategic importance from the military point of view was fully understood which is evident by the presence of hill forts of Rohtas and Chunar in the east and Kalijar and Gwalior in the west. It is said that the passes of Shahabad and Teliagarhi, situated at a distance of only about five kilometers from each other, served as the gateway to Bengal.

On the Western side of the plateau and the Thar desert is situated the rich lowland of Gujarat having several low hills and watered by a number of rivers like Mahi, Sabarmati, and lower courses of Narmada and Tapti. The Kathiawar peninsula and the Rann of Kutch are marshy and dry during the hot season.

The Deccan Plateau

As we have noted earlier, the surface of the Deccan plateau slopes down from west to east. On the western side lies a range of high cliffs running south to north leaving a narrow strip of plain between it and the sea. It is called the Western Ghats, which rises up to 3,000 feet. The plateau is higher in the south being about 2000 feet in the Mysore region and about half of that in the Hyderabad. The Eastern Ghats, consisting of groups of low hills, is marked by several gaps through which many peninsular rivers join the Bay of

Bengal. The hills going southwards gradually receding from the sea turn westward to join the Western Ghats at the Nilgiri. The plain between Eastern Ghats and the sea is wider than that of Western Ghats.

Except the Narmada and the Tapti, which run towards west and join the Arabian sea, all the rivers of the Peninsular India run from west to east. Most of them rise from the Western Ghat and traversing the whole breadth of the plateau, fall in the Bay. The Mahanadi forms a broad plain known as the Chattisgarh plain in the north-east. It passes through Orissa before joining the sea. The valley of Godavari with its tributaries, has a large flat land in the north but it narrows in the east before meeting the sea. Further south, the Krishna, with its tributaries like the Tungabhadra, divide the Deccan plateau into two sections. Further south, the Kaveri and its tributaries form another important river system. One thing should be mentioned here that these rivers are different from those of the north India. Devoid of a perennial water source like the Himalayas, these southern rivers are mostly dry during the hot season, hence less valuable for irrigation and navigation purposes.

The Coastal Regions

The fertile coastal plains are important because they also provide opportunities for maritime activities and trade. The western coastal plain stretches from the Gulf of Cambay in the north to Kerala in south. The northern part is called the Konkan while the southern one is called the Malabar Coast. The rainfall in this region is very high. There are no big rivers but smaller rivers provide easy communication and irrigation. There are some good harbours in the Konkan region and also in the Malabar. On the other hand the eastern coast has a few natural harbours but during the historical period maritime activities lead to more vigorous and fruitful contacts with the south-east Asian countries.

The southern tip of the peninsula is known as Cape Comorin or Kanyakumari. To its south-east is the island of Sri Lanka, which though not an integral part, has been closely associated with India. An almost continuous chain of islands and shoals connect India with this island which has been given the name of Adam's Bridge. The mango shaped island was known in ancient times by the name of Tambaparni, a corrupt word from Sanskrit *Tambraparni*, i.e., having a look or shape of *tambula* or betel leaf. It was also known as Simhaladvipa.

Climate

The Indian subcontinent is situated mostly in the tropical zone. Guarded by the lofty Himalayas from the cold arctic winds from Siberia, it has a fairly warm climate throughout the year. It has regular six *ritus* of two months each and three seasons of four months. Roughly March through June is the hot season when temperature goes up to 48° C or more in some regions. Then follows the rainy season for four months from July to October. The south-west monsoon brings rain in varying degrees throughout the country.

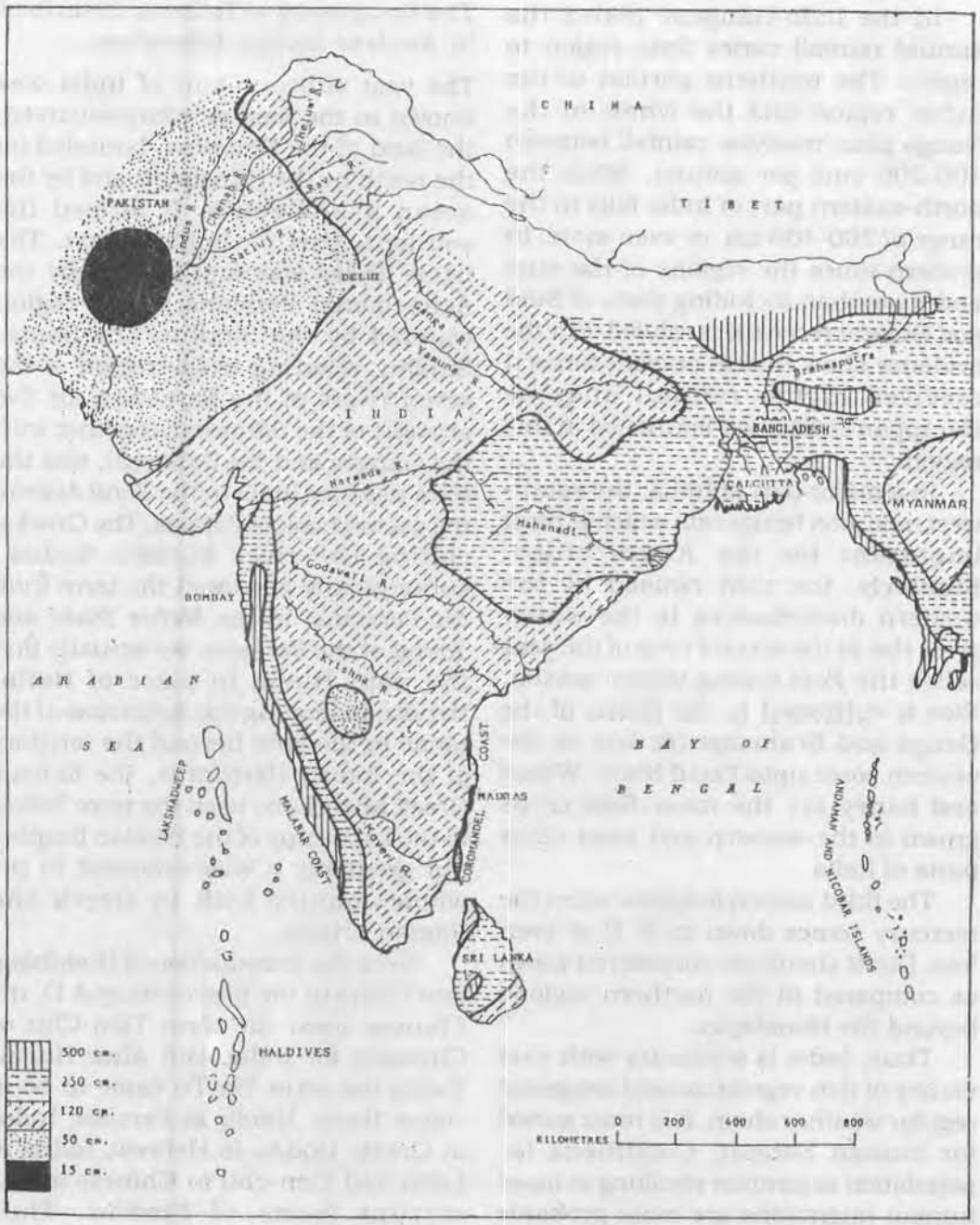


***Fig. 4.2** Annual Rainfall Zones*

In the Indo-Gangetic plains the annual rainfall varies from region to region. The northern portion of the Indus region and the whole of the Ganga plain receives rainfall between 100-200 cms per annum, While the north-eastern part of India falls in the range of 200-400 cm. or even more. In modern times the regions of Haryana and Rajasthan including parts of Sind and Gujarat receive less rainfall. But the evidence show that in ancient times it received higher rainfall and the Harappan civilization flourished in this region.

In a major part of India, the south-west monsoon brings rain which is most important for the *Kharif* crops. Similarly, the rain caused by the western disturbances in the winter gives rise to the second crop of the year called the *Rabi* during winter season. Rice is cultivated in the plains of the Ganga and Brahmaputra and in the eastern coast upto Tamil Nadu. Wheat and barley are the main *Rabi* crops grown in the western and most other parts of India.

The third season is winter when the mercury comes down to 5° C or even less. But it should be considered warm as compared to the northern regions beyond the Himalayas.

Thus, India is a country with vast variety of rich vegetation and congenial regular weather chain. It is most suited for human habitat. Conditions for population saturation resulting in mass human migrations are more probable here than in any other part of the world like central Asia or Europe.

The Geography of India as described in Ancient Indian Literature

The vast subcontinent of India was known in the past as *Bharatavarsha,* the land of the Bharatas, bounded on the north by the Himalayas and by the ocean in the south. It formed the southern part of Jambu-dvipa. The name 'India' was first applied by the Achaemenid Persians to the region watered by the Sindhu. The Sapta-Sindhu, referring to the region of the seven rivers of the Saraswati (or five streams of the Saraswati together with the Ganges and the Jamuna), was the term used for India in the *Zend Avesta,* the sacred book of Parasis. The Greeks, calling the river Sindhu 'Indos', subsequently borrowed the term from the Persians. In the *Mehre Yasht* and *Yasna* of the Persians we actually find the word Hindu in place of Hafta-Hendu, indicating the extension of the name to the land beyond the territory of the Indus. Herodotus, the famous Greek historians, used the term 'Indos' to the kshatrapy of the Persian Empire, but gradually it was extended to the whole country both by Greek and Roman writers.

Since the introduction of Buddhism into China in the first century A.D. the Chinese used the term Tien-Chu or Chuantu for India. But after Hiuen-Tsang the term Yin-Tu came to be in vogue there. Hindu in Persian, Indos in Greek, Hoddu in Hebrew, Indus in Latin and Tien-chu in Chinese are all corrupt forms of Sindhu. Thus descendants of Bharata came to be known as Indians or Hindus. "Hindu",

says I-tsing, "is the name used only by the northern tribes, and the people of India themselves do not know it".

The first definite mention of Bharata as a region is to be found in Panini who lived about sixth century B.C. It is only one out of 22 janapadas specified from Kamboja to Magadha, all in Northern India. Buddhist literature subsequently speaks of seven Bharata regions (Sapta-Bharatas) corresponding to the ancient Sapta-Sindhu. Arya-desa and Brahmarashtra were other names of India mentioned by I-tsing. Aryavarta was also another ancient name given at the time of Patanjali (150 B.C.) to the northern part of India lying between the Himalayas and the Pariyatraka or the western part of the Vindhyas. On the west it was bounded by the Adarsavali or Aravalli and on the east by the Kalakavana or the Rajmahal Hills. The *Puranas* define the term Bharatavarsha as "the country that lies north of the ocean (i.e. the Indian Ocean) and south of the snowy mountains (Himalayas), marked by the seven main chains of mountains, *viz.* Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Suktimat, Riksha (mountains of Gondwana), Vindhya, and Pariyatra (western Vindhyas up to the Aravallis); where dwell the descendants of the Bharatas, with the Kiratas living to its east, the Yavanas (Ionians or Greeks) to its west, and its own population consisting of the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras (i.e. the Hindus)".

But the name Bharatavarsha is not a mere geographical expression like the term India. It has historical significance, indicating the country of the Bharatas of *RigVeda*. It engaged their deepest sentiments of love and service as expressed in their literature. One of the commonest prayers for a Hindu requires him to recall and worship the image of his mother country as the land of seven sacred rivers, the Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaveri, which between them cover its entire area. Another prayer calls its image as the land of seven sacred cities, Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya (modern Hardwar), Kasi, Kanchi (Conjeeveram), Avantika (Ujjain), Dvaravati (Dwarka), representing important regions of India. The spirit of these prayers is further sustained by the peculiar Hindu institution of pilgrimage. It expects a Hindu to visit in his life the holy places associated with his faith. Each of the principal Hindu faiths like Vaishnava, Saiva, or Sakta and other sects have their own list of holy places, and these are spread throughout the length and breadth of India and not confined to a single province. The different sects are at one in enjoining upon their respective votaries, a pilgrimage to the different and distant parts of India and thereby fostering in them a live sense of what constitutes their common mother country. In the same spirit, Sankara established his four Mathas (religious schools) at the four extreme points of the country viz. Jyotirmatha in the north (near Badri-Kedar on the Himalayas), Saradamatha at Dwarka in the west, Goverdhana matha at Puri in the east, and Sringeri

matha in Mysore. Sectarianism is thus an aid to nationalism in Hindu culture. In some of the sacred texts like the *Bhagavata Purana,* or *Manusmriti* are found passages of patriotic fervour describing Bharatavarsha as the land fashioned by the Gods themselves (*devanirmita sthanam*) who even wish to be born in it as heaven on earth, for the spiritual stimulus of its environment, and above these as the culminating utterance — "Mother and Mother-Country are greater than Heaven !" (*Janani janmabhumischa svargadapi gariyasi*).

All these prayers and passages show that a Hindu has elevated patriotism into a religion. In the words of a distinguished British critic, "the Hindu regards India not only as a political unit, naturally the subject of one sovereignty – whoever holds that sovereignty, whether British, Mohamedan, or Hindu – but as the outward embodiment, as the temple – nay, even as the Goddess mother - of his spiritual culture... He made India the symbol of his culture; he filled it with this soul. In his consciousness, it was his greater self".

But besides religion, the political experiences of the ancient Hindus also aided them in their conception of the mother country. The unity of a country is easily grasped when it is controlled by a single political authority. The ancient Hindus were familiar with the ideal and institution of paramount sovereignty from very early times. It is indicated by such significant Vedic words as *Ekarat, Samrat, Rajadhiraja,* or *Sarvabhauma,* and such Vedic ceremonies as the *Rajasuya, Vajapeya,* or *Ashvamedha,* which were prescribed for performance by a king who by his *digvijaya* or conquest made himself the king of kings. Some of the Vedic works and later texts like the *Mahabharata* or the *Puranas* even contain lists of such great kings or emperors. Apart from these prehistoric emperors, there have been several such emperors in historical times, such as Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, Samudragupta, Harsha, Mihira Bhoja, and in later times, Akbar and Aurangzeb. Some even performed the horse-sacrifice in declaration of their paramount sovereignty, such as Pushyamitra, Samudragupta, Kumaragupta I, Adityasena and Pulkeshin I. Thus the institution of paramount sovereignty has had a long history in India.

Influences of Geography on Indian History

In many respects geographical features influence man's activities and his interactions with nature and other groups of men. The natural barriers of hills, mountains and rivers, etc., give him an idea of a geographical unite and belonging. He develops his living habits and mode of thinking as per his surroundings. We have seen that Indian subcontinent is a vast country with well defined natural barriers in the form of Himalayas in the north and coastal boundaries on the three remaining sides. This gives the inhabitants a

feeling of oneness. They regard this as their motherland. Its vastness can be measured when compared to Europe and finding it almost equal except for the former Soviet Union. Europe has several nations with their own history, tradition, language, etc. On the contrary, although there always had been many states in India but their social and cultural setup had been broadly the same throughout. Sanskrit was the most respected language besides the local languages. States were administered and governed on the basis of law-books called *Dharmasastras*. Places of worship and pilgrimage are distributed throughout the country. These cultural bonds gave the Indians a sense of unity and nationality.

At the same time there are distinct regional variations. There are several regions which have a distinct sense of regional spirit and cultural traits. Larger kingdoms and empires rose from these units and weakened, in due course, giving way to another unit to come up. Some historians have defined it as forces of centralisation and decentralisation acting and reacting with each other. In other words, forces of integration and disintegration were always at work. But it will be more appropriate to say that the Indian system of polity recognised the *chakravarti* concept of conquest, where every king should aspire for ruling the whole country. Thus empires fell and new ones arose from it, but the tradition continued. Even the early conquerors from the north-west like Indo-Greeks, Saka-Pallavas, Kushanas, etc., established kingdoms and empires but never failed to show their eagerness to adopt Indian ideas of polity and willingness to assimilate themselves in the main stream of Indian society.

Even in earlier periods these regions maintained their individuality despite their political ups and downs. 'The old kingdoms of Kosala, Magadha, Gauda, Vanga, Avanti, Lat and Saurashtra in the north, and Kalinga, Andhra, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chera, Chola and Pandya in the south, among others, seem to possess eternal lives. Empires rose and fell, they vied with each other very frequently, but these states under different names and under various ruling dynasties, continued their individual existence almost throughout the course of history.

India has a long coast line on its three sides. The people living here were experts in maritime activities. They had trade relations with other countries on both sides. No dynasty other than the Cholas in the south has even attempted to conquer lands beyond the sea. But it was not a lasting attempt.

On the contrary we find that Indians had spread in many parts of the known world, but in the South East Asia they developed a lasting cultural influence in countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, etc. These were individual efforts by traders and princes and not by any State. A distinct contrast from the European colonist must be noted here. Indians never attempted genocide or

cruel suppression; they established large kingdoms and became part of that land. They gave their religion and philosophy to them but assimilated their religion and philosophy as well.

Thus it can be said in conclusion that the geographical features of India not only shaped its history and culture but also the mind and thoughts of the people.

Exercises

1. Explain the meaning of the following:
   Aryavrata, Panchanada desa, Rabi and *Kharif* crops.
2. Define the physical features of India.
3. Define the climate of India.
4. Discuss the geography of India as defined in the ancient literature.
5. How do these geographical features influence history?

Things to Do

- Prepare a map of India and show important rivers on it.

Chapter 5

The Stone Age Cultures

One of the best ways to understand the relation between the earth and all that exists on it is to imagine that the earth is 46 years old. And when we write her life history, we find that we know nothing about the first seven years of her life, but the deeds of her later childhood are to be seen in the old rocks.

Introduction

Ten years is a long time in modern science and a long time in the life of a man. But in the case of our planet ten years is almost nothing. It is scarcely enough to add a tenth of an inch to the great thickness of rocks that grow by the accumulation of mud on the bed of the shallow sea. Only the most sharp eyed among us will notice how the earth changes in his lifetime, except in its most active zones.

By scrutiny of fossils and of subtleties in atomic composition of rocks, geologists can fix dates of events in the earth's history with a fair amount of confidence. With the age of earth estimated 4,600 million years (m.y.), we can make only very inadequate comparisons with familiar things.

Age of the Earth

One of the best ways to understand the relation between the earth and all that exists on it is to imagine that the earth is 46 years old. And when we write her life history, we find that we know nothing about the first seven years of her life, but the deeds of her later childhood are to be seen in the old rocks. (See Table 1)

Most of what we recognise on earth, including all substantial life is the product of the last six years of its life (i.e. 600 m.y.). She flowered, in her middle age. Her continents were quite bare of life till she was almost 42 and flowering plants did not appear until she was 45 — just a year ago. At that time the great reptiles, including the dinosaurs, came into existence and the break-up of the last super-continent was in progress.

The dinosaurs passed away eight months ago and the early mammal replaced them. In the middle of last week, in Africa, some manlike apes developed into apelike man and at the weekend mother earth began shivering with the latest series of extremely cold ice-ages. Just over four hours have elapsed since a new species *Homo sapiens* came into existence and in the last hour it invented agriculture and settled down. Just about 30 minutes back the Pre-Harappan and Early Harappan cultures started developing. Just about 14 minutes back Buddha delivered his first sermon at Saranath, and the Mauryan empire flourished about 12 minutes back. Harsha gave all, whatever he had, the religious assembly at Prayag about 7 minutes back, and Akbar made a pilgrimage to Sufi Saint Salim Chisti just about two minutes back. India became a proud independent nation hardly two seconds back. (See Tables 1 and 2)

Another way to appreciate the age of earth in proportion to the period during which life has existed, and even more significant humans have existed, is to imagine a series of photographs put together to form a film. Suppose our first imaginary picture was taken 500 m.y. ago when the evidence of life appears in the fossiliferous rocks in the form of vertebrate and armoured fishes, and succeeding pictures were taken every 5000 years, we would have 1,00,000 (one lakh) negatives and the film would last an hour. At least half of

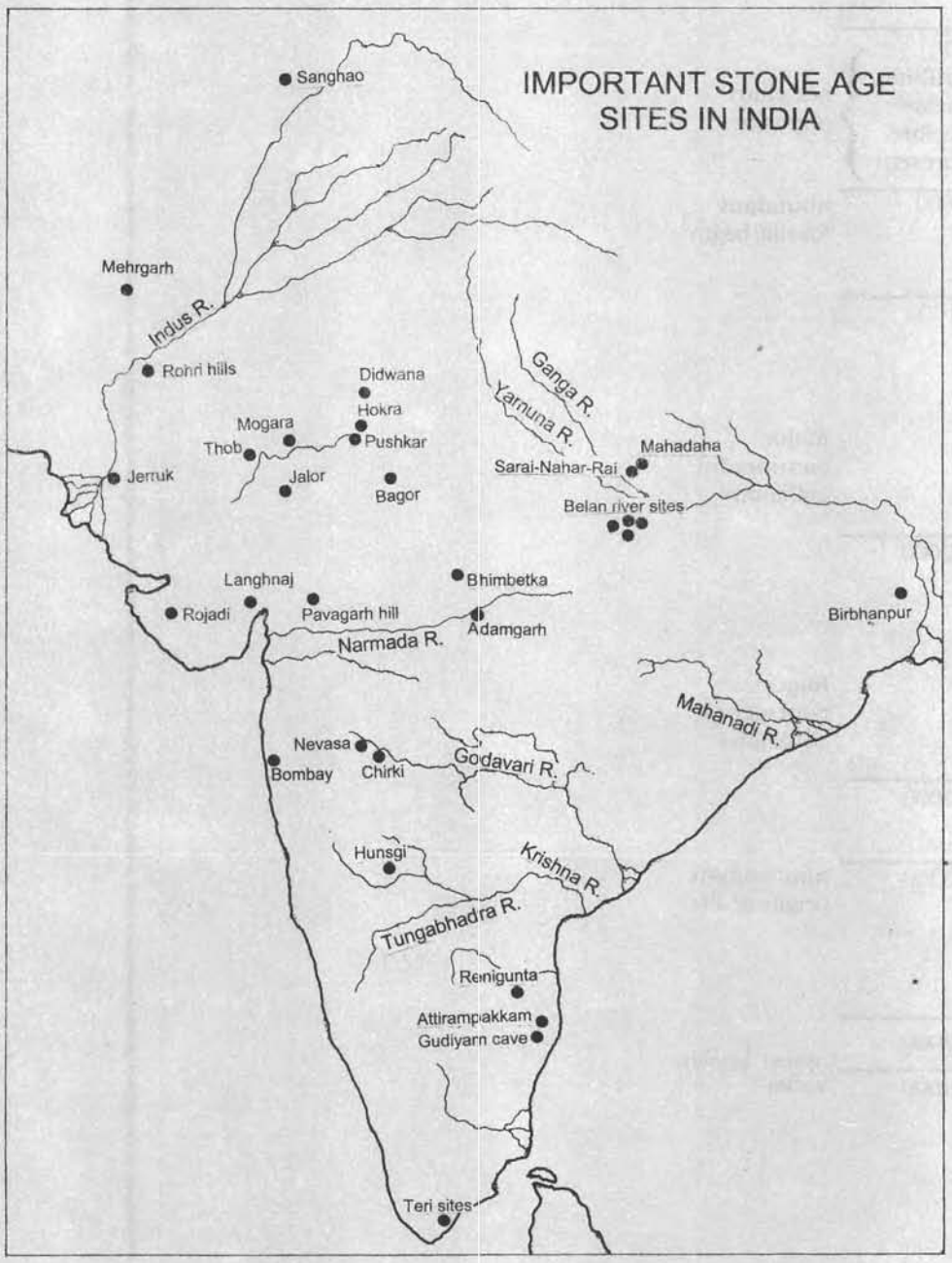


Fig. 5.1 *Important Stone Age Sites in India*

0 million years before present	see chart opposite
600	abundant fossils begin
1000	major continental collisions
2000	major continental collisions
3000	
3300	approximate origin of life
3900	oldest known rocks
4000	
4600	origin of Earth

Table 1 *Age of the Earth and the Origin of Life*

years in millions					years in millions
	QUATERNARY	PLEISTOCENE	First Homo		0
2					
	TERTIARY	PLIOCENE	Manlike apes	CAENOZOIC	
		MIOCENE			
		OLIGOCENE	Monkeys and apes		
		EOCENE			
64		PALAEOCENE	First primates		
	CRETACEOUS	First flowering plants			100
136	JURASSIC	First birds		MESOZOIC	
190	TRIASSIC	First dinosaurs First mammals			200
225	PERMIAN	First coniferous trees			
280	CARBONIFEROUS	First reptiles			300
345	DEVONIAN	First insects First amphibians First bony fish			400
410	SILURIAN	First land plants First fish with jaws		PALAEOZOIC	
440	ORDOVICIAN	First vertebrates First armoured fish			500
500	CAMBRIAN	First known invertebrates First shells			
600	PRE-CAMBRIAN	First living things Algae Bacteria			600
					700

Table 2 *Evolution of Life on the Earth*

the rock-forming history would have already passed, during which some 51 km. thick sedimentary rocks were laid down in the ocean and laters raised up. During the 500 million year covered by the film another 34 km. of rocks were made. When the reel opens, we see shells, jelly fish, crab-like creatures, and sea lilies. Phase by phase we see fishes, then amphibians and reptiles, and finally mammals. In the last 3 seconds human beings appear and the civilized man appears just in the last tenth of a second.

Early Humans

It is now well established that the earliest human fossils found in Africa dates back to about 4.2 m.y. These specimens show that the earliest human beings were shorter in height and had a smaller brain. The humans evolved over a period of these 42 lakhs years and the present form reached about 50,000 years ago. The fossils of various periods and stages of human development have been found from many parts of the world like Africa, China, Java, Sumatra and southern Europe. Unfortunately, due to the climatic conditions, except the solitary find of a hominid fossil from Hathnaura in the Narmada Valley, no early human fossils have been found in India. According to the experts the estimated cranial capacity of this fossil is equal to that of *homo erectus*. However, some scholars feel that it may belong to the last phase of *homo erectus*, or an 'archaic' *homo sapien*.

Earliest Palaeolithic Tools

The beginning of the use of tools by the humans have been a unique phenomenon and may be said to have laid the foundation of science of use of tools and machines for the aid of humans in their various endeavour. The regular use of tools, beginning 2.6 m.y. ago in east Africa is well attested and accompanies many earlier and later hominid fossils. In case of Indonesia several hominid remains have recently been dated between 1.8 and 1.6 m.y. In China the early stone tools are associated with human fossils dated between 1.7 and 1.9 m.y.

In India, unfortunately, no human fossils have been found associated with Stone Age tools but we do have some idea of the antiquity of tools from the geological datings. The various strata of the Sivalik hills containing stone tools have been dated between 2 m.y. and 1.2 m.y. Another scientific date for the early stone tools came from the archaeological site of Bori in Pune district of Maharashtra. Which is 1.38 m.y old. When we assess the evidence for early human settlement in India we find that it is later than that in the African region, but contemporary to the rest of the Asian countries.

Palaeolithic Cultures

The Palaeolithic Age in India is divided into three phases, based on tool technology. These phases are:

(i) Lower Palaeolithic – Handaxe and cleaver industries

(ii) Middle Palaeolithic – Tools made on flakes

(iii) Upper Palaeolithic – Tools made on flakes and blades

Lower Palaeolithic Culture

The main tool types in this phase were handaxes and cleavers, along with chopper–chopping tools. They were made both on cores as well as flakes. Lower Palaeolithic sites are of several types: habitation sites (either under rock-shelters or in the open; factory sites associated with sources of raw materials; sites that combine elements of both these functions; and open air sites in any of these categories subsequently. The raw materials used for making these stone tools are of various kinds of stone, like quartzite, chert and sometimes even quartz and besalt, etc. These have been found covered with sand, silt, etc., as seen in river sections and terraces. The Lower Palaeolithic tools have been found over a large area, virtually from all over India, except the plains of the Indus, Saraswati, Brahmaputra and Ganga where raw material in the form of stone is not available.

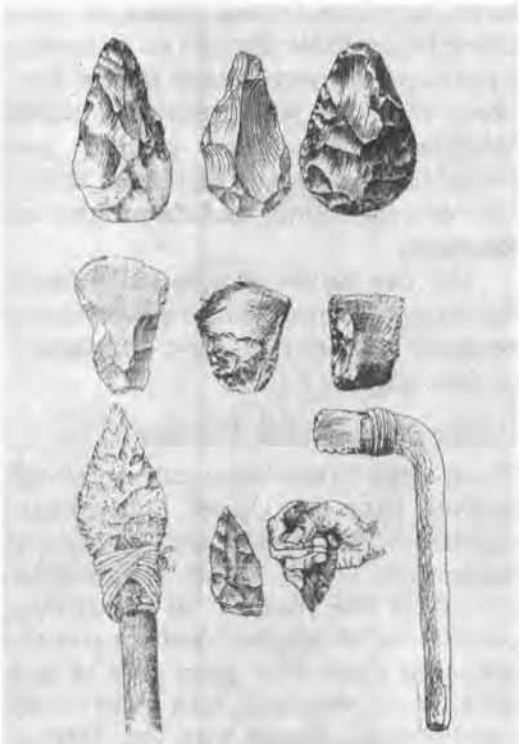


***Fig. 5.2** Lower Palaeolithic Tools*

Some of the important sites of Lower Palaeolithic cultures are Pahalgam in Kashmir, Belan valley in Allahabad district (Uttar Pradesh) Bhimbetka and Adamgarh in Hoshangabad district, (Madhya Pradesh), 16 R and Singi Talav in Nagaur district (Rajasthan), Nevasa in Ahmadnagar district (Maharashtra), Hunsgi in Gulburga district (in Karnataka) and the famous site of Attirampakkam (Tamil Nadu).

The sites have been widespread in Sivalik range of Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Belan valley in Uttar Pradesh, Berach basin and the hilly area of Rajasthan, and Narmada and Sone valleys in Madhya Pradesh, Malprabha and Ghatprabha basins in Karnataka, several areas of Maharashtra, areas near Chennai in Tamil Nadu and Chhota Nagpur plateau, and in areas of Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.

Besides the early dates mentioned above, other dates available from the Potwar plateau, western Rajasthan, Saurashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka Palaeolithic sites indicate that the

Lower Palaeolithic culture was quite widespread phenomenon between 6,00,000 and 60,000 B.C.

Middle Palaeolithic Culture

The middle Palaeolithic tool technology is characterised basically by the flake-tool industry. The tools are made on flakes obtained by striking them out from pebbles or cobbles. The tool types include small and medium-sized handaxes, cleavers and various kinds of scrapers, borers, and knives. The tools show regional variations both in terms of available raw materials as well as shapes and sizes. There are large borers or awls, worked with steep retouch on thick flakes. The scrapers are of several kinds, like straight, concave and convex-sided. Burins are also found to be associated with this industry but not as widely distributed as in the later periods.

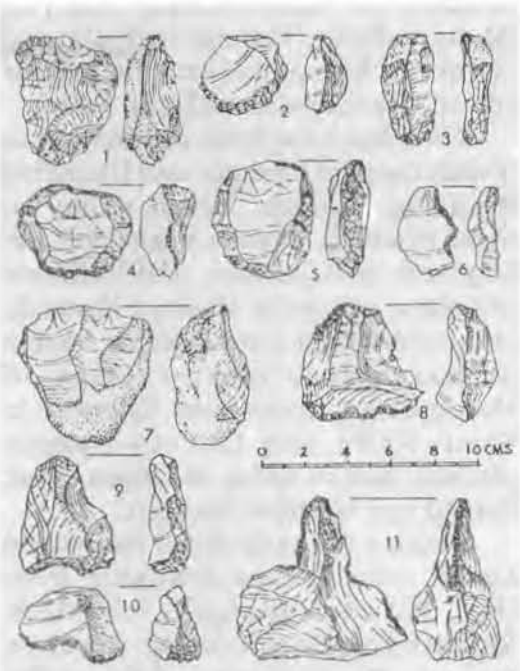


***Fig. 5.3** Middle Palaeolithic Tools*

Middle Palaeolithic tools have mostly been found in Central India, Deccan, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Orissa. Wherever the Middle Palaeolithic industries have developed from those of the Lower Palaeolithic, there is an unbroken continuity of occupation of the site. Some of the most important sites of Middle Palaeolithic period are Bhimbetka, Nevasa, Pushkar, Rohiri hills of upper Sind, and Samnapur on Narmada.

On the basis of scientific dates the middle Palaeolithic can be dated between 1,50,000 B.C. and 40,000B.C. or even slightly later.

Upper Palaeolithic Culture

The middle Palaeolithic culture slowly evolved into the Upper Palaeolithic culture. The basic technological innovation of the Upper Palaeolithic period is the method of producing parallel sided blades from a carefully prepared core. One good core of this kind, once prepared, can yield many parallel-sided blades with very little or no further preparation.

The upper Palaeolithic tools have been found in Rajasthan, parts of the Ganga and Belan valleys, Central and Western India, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The main tool types are scrapers, points, awls, burins, borers, knives, etc. It appears that the concept of composite tools start developing during this cultural period.

***Fig 5.4** Upper Palaeolithic Tools*

The blade tools are comparatively large, sometimes upto to 8 cm.

From the scientific dates available from the various sites in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra one may safely say that upper Palaeolithic period lasted from about 45,000 to 10,000 B.C.

One of the most remarkable discovery of the Upper Palaeolithic period is that of a rubble built, roughly circular platform of about 85 cm in diameter. In the centre of this rubble platform the excavators of Allahabad and Berkeley Universities located a triangular piece of natural stone (15 cm high, 6.5 cm wide and about 6.5 cm thick). According to the excavators, '... there is absolutely no doubt that the rubble platform with its unique stone, and the chert artefacts throughout the rest of the site, are contemporaneous and were made by a group of final upper palaeolithic hunter-gatherers'. A piece of natural stone found in the center of the platform has generated great interest. Such stones are found on the top of the Kaimur escarpment nearby and show triangular or ellipsoidal laminations which are yellowish-brown to reddish-brown in colour. They are placed on rubble-made platforms and worshipped as female principle or *Sakti* in the countryside, passing for one *Mai* (Mother Goddess) or another. The identical shape, size and nature of the Upper Palaeolithic specimen, dated 9000-8000 BC, and the ones that are kept in the modern village shrines is significant.

Mesolithic Culture

With the passage of time there was a marked diminution in the size of stone tools, reaching its culmination in the mesolithic period. This period is labelled in India variously as, Late Stone Age, Mesolithic or Microlithic period. The microlithic tools are characterized by parallel-sided blades taken out from prepared cores of such fine material as chert, chalcedony, crystal, jasper, carnelian, agate, etc. These tools are generally 1 to 5 cm. long and the types include smaller version of upper Palaeolithic types such as points, scrappers, burins, awls, etc., besides some new tool-types like lunates,

trapezes, triangles, arrowheads, of various shapes and sizes. Their size makes it very obvious that they were used as composite tools, and were hafted in wood, bones, etc. That the microlithic industry is rooted in the preceding phase of the Upper Palaeolithic industry is proved both by the continuation of the archaeological stratigraphy from the Upper Palaeolithic into the microlithic and from the physical evolution of the later category from the former.

The C-14 dates available for the Mesolithic culture from various sites in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh show that this industry began around 12,000 B.C. and survived upto 2,000 B.C. From sites in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh we come to know that these communities were essentially hunters, food-gatherers and fishermen, but also practised some form of agriculture. The evidence from several sites like Mahadaha and Damdama in the Ganga plains, shows that seasonally they occupied some of these sites. From the sites of Bagor in Rajasthan and also Langhnaj in Gujarat we came to know that these Mesolithic communities were in touch with people of the Harappan and other Chalcolithic cultures and traded various items with them. From Bagor three copper arrowheads, typical of the Harappan Civilization, have been found.

Some of the most important and extensively studied sites of Mesolithic culture are Bagor in Rajasthan, Langhnaj in Gujarat, Sarai Nahar Rai, Chopani Mando, Mahdaha and Damdama in Uttar Pradesh, and Bhimbetka and Adamgarh in Madhya Pradesh.

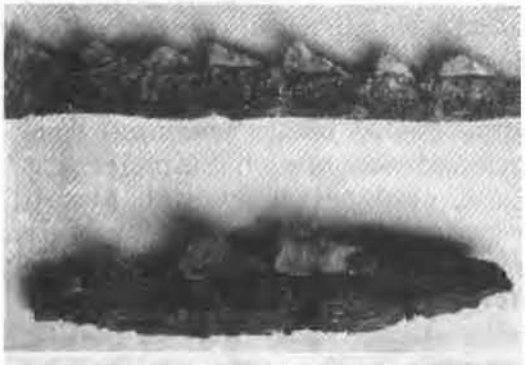


***Fig. 5.5** (a) Mesolithic Tools Hafted in Wooden Handle*

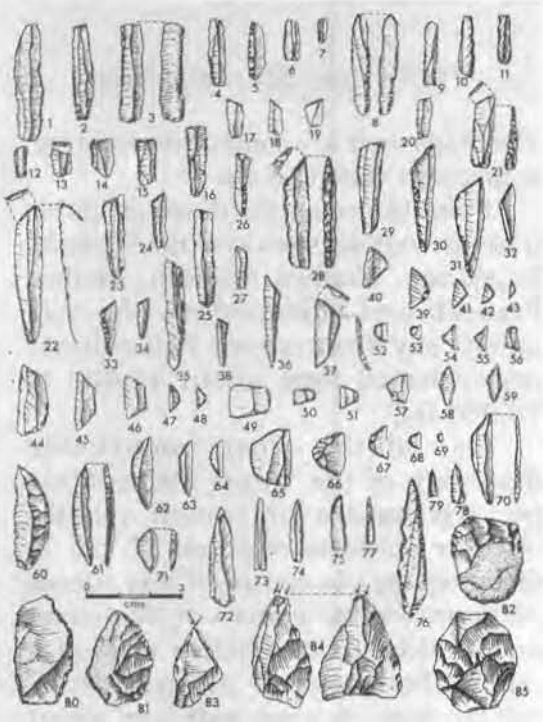


***Fig. 5.5** (b) Mesolithic Tools*

From Bagor and Adamgarh we get the evidence of the association of sheep and goat with the Mesolithic people, around sixth millennium B.C. This suggests that they may have partly adopted the settled way of life.

We must not be surprised by the occurrence of Mesolithic culture and advanced Harappan civilization in the same period. We must recall that in India distinct, self-contained social groups, at different levels of cultural and technological development survived right into this century. They include hunting and food-gathering tribes, pastoral nomads, shifting cultivators, traditional settled agriculturists, modern developed agriculturists, and several levels of urban industrial society, all coexisting and economically independent as well as interdependent. This provides us with the basic model for our past developments.

In the context of modern India we know that even today for about 2-3 months in the lean agricultural seasons every year, the landless labourers, tribal people and poor people survive, at least partly, by foraging for edible roots, leaves, seeds and fruits which grow naturally in the countryside. The Mesolithic way of life in India is still far more important to us than we are willing to admit. Besides, some of our modern cults and important cult spots may well have a Mesolithic background or ancestry.

Prehistoric Rock Art

Almost all the rock-shelters in India occupied by the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic people, and many others as well, contain rock-paintings depicting a variety of subjects, chiefly animals, or scenes including both people and animals. The distribution of these rock-paintings is very wide. They have been found in Chargul in north-west

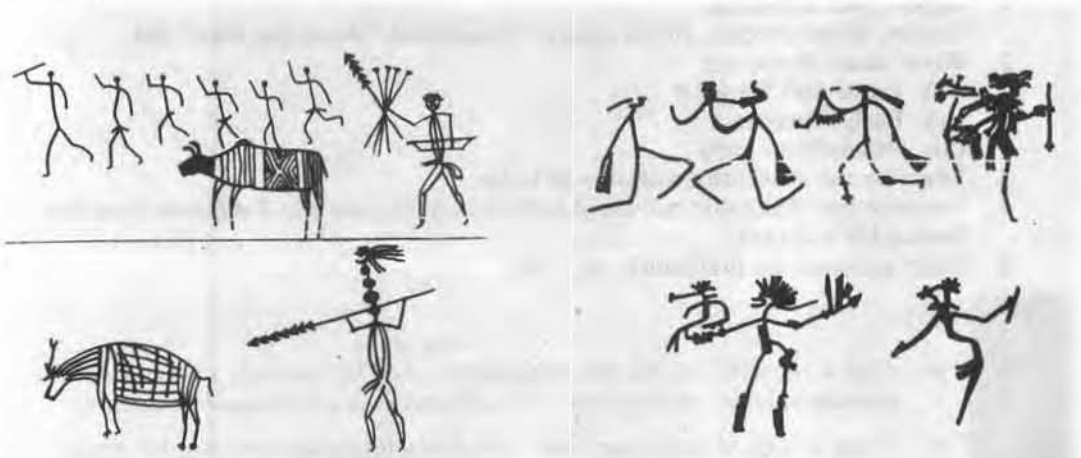


Fig. 5.6 *Mesolithic Rock Art*

Pakistan to Orissa in the east, and from the Kumaon hills in the north to Kerala in the south. Some of the important rock-painting sites are Murhana Pahar in Uttar Pradesh, Bhimbetka, Adamgarh, Lakha Juar in Madhya Pradesh and Kupagallu in Karnataka. The occurrence of haematite pieces found in the occupational debris of Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods conclusively proves that these paintings were made by the occupants of those caves and shelters. Animals are the most frequently depicted subject either alone or in large and small groups and shown in various poses. There are also some hunting scenes, of which the rhinoceros hunt from the Adamgarh group of rock-shelters is indicative of the joining of large number of people for the hunt of bigger animals. The animals are drawn in bold outline, and the bodies are sometimes filled in completely, or partially with cross-hatching. Examples of all the three methods can be seen among the drawings of animals in the caves or rock-shelters at Morhana Pahar in Uttar Pradesh, and Bhimbetka and Adamgarh in Madhya Pradesh. Besides the animals, birds, fishes, etc. have also been depicted.

Depiction of human figures in rock-paintings is quite common. These are in simple outline forms as well as with hatched body. The humans are shown in various activities, such as dancing, running, hunting, playing games and engaged in battle. The colours used in making these drawings are deep red, green, white and, yellow.

Exercises

1. Explain the following:
   Fossils, *Homo erectus, Homo sapien*, Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Rock Art.
2. Write short notes on:
   (i) Earth and life on it
   (ii) Early Humans
   (iii) Palaeolithic tools
3. Describe the Paleolithic cultures of India.
4. Describe the Mesolithic culture of India and write how was it different from the Paleolithic cultures.
5. Write an essay on prehistoric rock art.

Things to Do

- Visit a musem and see the implements used by the early man, collect the photographs of various types of tools and make a collage or sketches.
- Draw a map of India and plot on it some important Palaeolithic sites.

CHAPTER 6

THE NEOLITHIC AGE : THE BEGINNING OF SETTLED LIFE

PERHAPS the most fundamental advance that has affected the course of human life was the domestication of a large number of animals and plants.

At the end of the Pleistocene Age, approximately 10,000 years ago, climatic conditions more or less similar to those of today were established in western and southern Asia. This provided the setting for a number of important advances in human control of the environment and led to a series of events which resulted ultimately in the appearance of the first urban societies in both regions, some six thousand years ago. Perhaps the most fundamental advance that has affected the course of human life was the domestication of a large number of animals and plants. The present evidence suggests that in west Asia, wheat and barley were domesticated by *c.* 7000 B.C. Rice seems to have been domesticated in India by about 7000 B.C., as the evidence from Koldihwa in the Belan valley shows. Evidence from several sites (especially Aq Kupruk in Afghanistan) suggests that wild precursors of domesticated sheep, goat and cattle were being exploited by man about 16,000 years back. The continuing presence of sheep and goat bones in good quantities in early phase of Neolithic culture in that area (dated to *c.* 7000-10000 B.C.) has been interpreted as an indication that they had already been domesticated by that time.

The domestication of various species of animals produced the specialised pastoralists who appear to have continued to the modern times to lead a nomadic and semi-nomadic life. On the other hand the domestication and successful exploitation of various *species* of wild plants produced a shift towards sedentary settlements, and came to dominate the subsequent economic and cultural developments.

In the Indian context, the Neolithic-agriculture based regions can roughly be divided into four groups: (i) the Indus system and its western borderland; (ii) Ganga valley (iii) western India and the northern Deccan and (iv) the southern Deccan.

The economy of all these early Neolithic cultures was based on agriculture and animal domestication. The earliest evidence for Neolithic culture based on agricultural economy comes from the north-western part of the Indo-Pakistan region — basically in the Quetta valley and in the valleys of Loralai and Zob rivers. The archaeological sites of Kile Ghul Mohammad, Gumla, Rana Ghundai, Anjira, Mundigak, and Mehrgarh in the Kacchi plain give evidence of a date between *c.* 7000-5000 B.C. Of these, Mehrgarh has been most extensively examined. The evidence shows that the habitation here began in about *c.* 7000 B.C. but in the early period no use of ceramic is seen. However, in about a 1000 years time i.e. around *c.* 6000 B.C. earthen pots and pans come in use: first handmade and then wheel-made. In the pre-ceramic period an irregular scatter of square or rectangular houses made of mud-bricks and separated by refuse dumps and passage ways made up the first village. The houses were sub divided into four or more internal compartments, some of which may have been used for storage.

***Fig. 6.1** Important Neolithic Sites*

The subsistence of early inhabitants was focused primarily on hunting and food gathering, supplemented by some agriculture and animal husbandry. The domestic cereals found in these levels include wheat and barley. Bones of domesticated animals include sheep, goat, pig and cattle.

With the onset of the sixth millennium B.C., pottery, first handmade, and then wheel-made, came into use. From the bone remains, it is clear that humped variety of cattle also came to be domesticated. The beads found with burial remains show that people used beads made of lapis lazuli, carnelian, banded agate and white marine shell. A single copper bead has also been found. The occurrence of shell bangles and pendants made of mother-of-pearl indicates long-distance trade.

In short, the ceramic Neolithic occupation (*c.* 7000 B.C.) at Mehrgarh during the early food-producing era shows a basic subsistence economy of the Indus valley and beginning of trade and crafts. During the next 2500 years these communities developed new technologies to produce pottery and figurines of terracotta, elaborate ornaments of stone and metal, tools and utensils, and architectural style.

To the east of the Indus valley, in Ganga valley, Assam and the north-east region, a large number of Neolithic sites have been found. Some

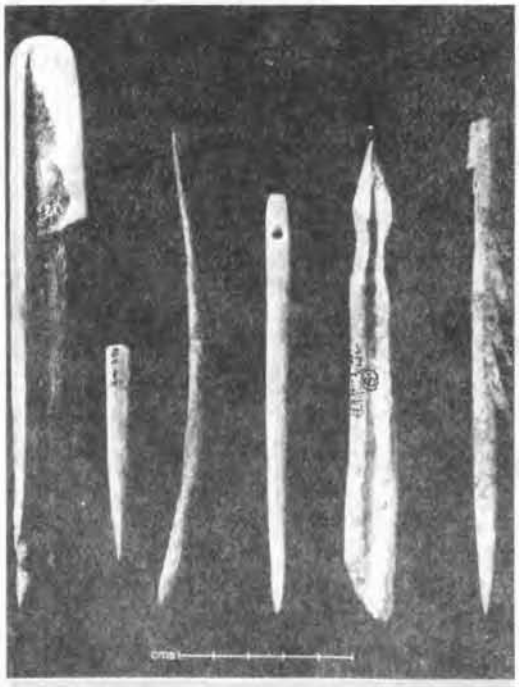


***Fig. 6.2** (a) Neolithic Bone Tools*

***Fig. 6.2** (b) Neolithic Stone Tools*

of the most important sites are Gufkral and Burzahom in Kashmir, Mahgara, Chopani Mando and Koldihwa in Belan valley in Uttar Pradesh, and Chirand in Bihar.

Three radiocarbon dates from Koldihwa provide the earliest evidence for the domesticated variety of rice going back to about *c.* 6500 B.C. which make it the oldest evidence of rice in any part of the world. Thus, in all probability agriculture in the Belan valley began around *c.* 6500 B.C. Besides rice, evidence for barley cultivation is attested at Mahgara.

The bone remains from Koldihwa and Mahgara show that cattle, sheep and goat were domesticated in the region. In Mahgara, evidence of a cattle pen has also been met with.

In the north-west, the early Neolithic settlers in Burzahom lived in pit dwellings, rather than building houses over the ground.

The settlement at Chirand in Bihar is relatively late. From Assam and further north-east regions small polished Neolithic stone axes have been found from Cochar hills, Garo hills and Naga hills. Unfortunately, so far very little cultural material has been found to throw light on the life of the makers of these axes and there is little or no dating evidence. The excavations at Sarutaru near Guwahati revealed shouldered celts and round-butted axes associated with crude cord-or basket-marked pottery.

In south India, we have the most decisive evidence of new patterns of subsistence, almost contemporary with the Harappan culture. Some of the most important sites in southern India are Kodekal, Utnur, Nagarjunikonda and Palavoy in Andhra Pradesh; Tekkalkolta, Maski, T. Narsipur, Sangankallu, Hallur and Brahmagiri in Karnataka and Paiyampalli in Tamil Nadu. The southern Neolithic Age is dated between 2600 and 800 B.C. It has three phases. Phase I is totally devoid of metal tools and in the second phase tools of copper and bronze are found in limited quantity. The evidence shows that people domesticated cattle, sheep and goat and practised some agriculture. Pottery of both handmade as well as wheel-made variety was used.

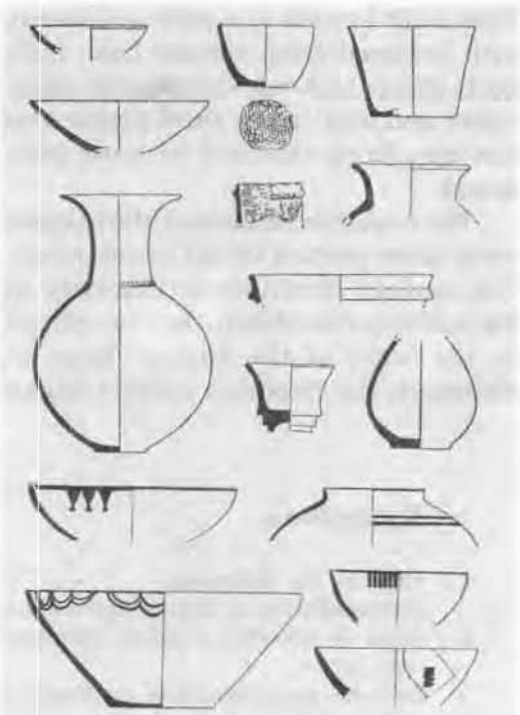


Fig. 6.3 *Neolithic Pottery*

They built houses of wattle-and-daub, with rammed floor, tended cow, bull, goat, sheep, and cultivated horse gram, millet and *ragi*. In the third phase iron has also been reported to have been found.

The evidence discussed above leads us to draw certain broad conclusions. The earliest Neolithic settlements in the Indian subcontinent first developed in the west of the Indus. Here at Mehrgarh the Neolithic culture began about 8,000 B.C. and soon it became a widespread phenomenon. People lived in mud houses, wheat and barley were cultivated, and cattle, sheep and goat were domesticated. Long-distance trade for precious goods was also carried on. Almost about the same time, similar developments took place in the Belan valley also. By about 3,000 B.C. Neolithic culture was a widespread phenomenon and covered a large part of the Indian subcontinent.

Exercises

1. Explain the following:
   Domestication of plants and animals, Food gathering.
2. What is Neolithic culture and which are the earliest sites belonging to this culture?
3. Describe the economy of the Neolithic period. How is it different from Palaeolithic and Mesolithic economies?
4. Discuss some important sites of Neolithic culture and important findings associated with them.
5. Describe the lifestyle and religious beliefs of the Neolithic people.

Things to Do

- Make sketches of Neolithic tools and describe them.
- Make sketches of Palaeolithic tools.
- Visit a museum and note the difference between Neolithic, Palaeolithic and Mesolithic tools.

CHAPTER 7

THE CHALCOLITHIC CULTURES OF INDIA

In central India and Deccan a very different kind of culture developed which, though using metal, never reached the level of urbanisation.

THE end of the Neolithic period saw very different kind of developments in different areas. While in the Indus and Saraswati valleys there emerged, though slowly, a full-fledged civilization, in central India and Deccan a very different kind of culture developed which, though using metal, never reached the level of urbanisation. This was known as Chalcolithic culture. Some of these cultures were contemporary with the Harappan culture and other were decidedly later than Harappan. These cultures shared certain common features. They are all characterised by painted ceramic, usually black-on-red, a specialised blade and flake industry of the silicious material like chalcedony and chert, and copper and bronze tools, though on a restricted scale. Their economy was based on subsistence agriculture, stock-raising and hunting and fishing.

Fig. 7.1 *Important Chalcolithic and Copper Hoard Sites*

Some important Chalcolithic cultures are:

Ahar culture	c.2800-1500 B.C
Kayatha culture	c. 2450-1700 B.C.
Malwa culture	c. 1900-1400 B.C.
Savalda culture	c. 2300-2000 B.C.
Jorwe culture	c. 1500 -900 B.C.
Prabhas culture	c. 2000-1400 B.C.
Rangpur culture	c. 1700-1400 B.C.

The most distinguishing feature of these Chalcolithic cultures is their distinct painted pottery. The Kayatha culture is characterized by a sturdy red-slipped ware painted with designs in chocolate colour, a red painted buff ware and a combed ware bearing incised patterns. The Ahar people made a distinctive black-and-red ware decorated with white designs. The Malwa ware is rather coarse in fabric, but has a thick buff surface over which designs are made either in red or black. The Prabhas and Rangpur wares are both derived from the Harappan, but have a glossy surface due to which they are also called Lustrous Red Ware. Jorwe ware too is painted black-on-red but has a matt surface treated with a wash. Some of the most well-known pottery forms are dishes-on-stand, spouted vases, stemmed cups, pedestalled bowls, big storage jars, and spouted basins and bowls.

Most of these Chalcolithic cultures flourished in semi-arid regions of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. The settlements of Kayatha culture are only a few in number, mostly located on the Chambal and its tributaries. They are

***Fig. 7.2** Chalcolithic Pottery from Navdatoli*

relatively small in size and the biggest may be not over two hectares. In contrast to small Kayatha culture settlements those of Ahar Culture are big. At least three of them namely Ahar, Balathal and Gilund are of several hectares. Stone, mud bricks, and mud were used for the construction of houses and other structures. Excavations reveal that Balathal was a well fortified settlement. The people of Malwa culture settled mostly on the Narmada and its tributaries. Navdatoli, Eran and Nagada are the three best known settlements of Malwa culture. Navdatoli measures almost 10 hectares and is one of the largest Chalcolithic settlements in the country. It has been seen that some of these sites were fortified and Nagada had even a bastion of mud-bricks. Eran similarly had a fortification wall with a moat. Unfortunately not more than half a dozen settlements of Prabhas culture are known. The Rangpur culture sites are located mostly on Ghelo and Kalubhar rivers in Gujarat. The Jorwe settlements are comparatively larger in number. More than 200 settlements are known from Maharashtra. Prakash, Daimabad and Inamgaon are some of the best known settlements of this culture. The largest of these is Daimabad which measured almost 20 hectares.

The Chalcolithic people built rectangular and circular houses of mud wattle-and-daub. The circular houses were mostly in clusters. These houses and huts had roofs of straw supported on bamboo and wooden rafters. Floors

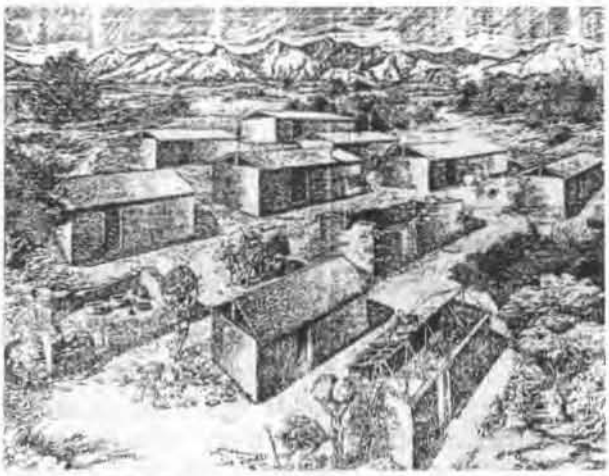


Fig. 7.3 *Reconstruction of an Excavated Chalcolithic Village – Ahar, Rajasthan*

were made of rammed clay and huts were used for storage also. People raised cattle as well as cultivated both *kharif* and *rabi* crops in rotation. Wheat and barley were grown in the area of Malwa. Rice is reported to have been found from Inamgaon and Ahar. These people also cultivated *jowar* and *bajra* and so also *kulth*, *ragi*, green peas, lentil and green and black grams.

Almost all these Chalcolithic cultures flourished in the black cotton soil zone. This clearly represents an ecological adaptation dictated by available technology, knowledge and means. An analogy with present-day agricultural methods in these regions leads to the supposition that we are dealing here with a system of dry farming, dependent on moisture-retentive soils.

Trade and Commerce

There is evidence to show that the Chalcolithic communities traded and

exchanged materials with other contemporary communities. Large settlements like Ahar, Gilund, Nagada, Navdatoli, Eran, Prabhas, Rangpur, Prakash, Daimabad and Inamgaon would have served as major centres of trade and exchange. It appears that Ahar people, settled close to the copper source, supplied copper tools and objects to other contemporary communities in Malwa and Gujarat. It has been suggested that most of the copper axes found in Malwa, Jorwe and Prabhas cultures bear some identification marks, which are almost identical, suggesting that they may be the trademarks of the smiths who made them. Conch shell for bangles were traded from the Saurashtra coast to various other parts of the Chalcolithic regions. Similarly, gold and ivory may have come from Tekkalkotta (Karnataka) to Jorwe people who in turn traded these to their contemporaries. The semiprecious stones may have been traded to various parts from Rajpipla (Gujarat). It is interesting to note that the Jorwe people traded even the pottery to distant places, as Inamgaon pottery has been found at several sites located away from it. This reminds us of Northern Black Polished Ware being exported with the trade from the plain Gangetic to far off regions, in the early historical period. Wheeled bullock carts, drawings of which have been found on pots, were used for long-distance trade, besides the river transport.

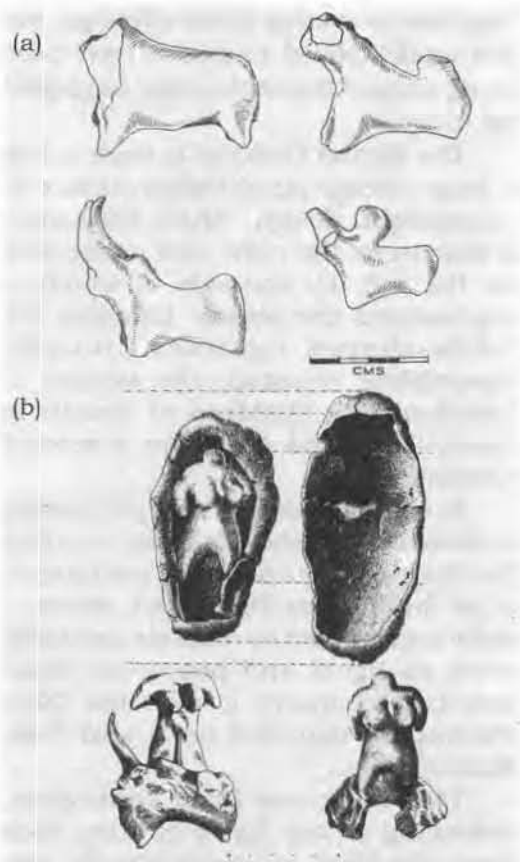


Fig. 7.4 *Objects of Religious Beliefs*
(a) Stylised Bull Figurines from Kayatha,
(b) Terracotta Objects from Inamgaon

Religious Beliefs

Religion was an aspect which interlinked all the Chalcolithic cultures. The worship of mother goddess and the bull was in vogue. The bull cult seems to have been predominant in Malwa during the Ahar period. A large number of these both naturalistic as well as stylised lingas have been found from most of the sites. The naturalistic ones

may have served as votive offerings, but the small stylised ones may have been hung around the neck as the Lingayats do today.

The Mother Goddess is depicted on a huge storage jar of Malwa culture in an appliqué design. She is flanked by a woman on the right and a crocodile on the left, by the side of which is represented the shrine. Likewise the fiddle-shaped figurines probably resembling *srivatsa*, the symbol of Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth in historical period represent a mother Goddess.

In a painted design on a pot, a deity is shown with dishevelled hair, recalling the Rudra of later period. A painting on a jar found from Daimabad; shows a deity surrounded by animals and birds such as tigers and peacocks. Some scholars compare it with the 'Siva Pashupati' depicted on a seal from Mohanjodaro.

Two figurines from Inamgaon, belonging to late Jorwe culture, have been identified as proto-Ganesh, who is worshipped for success before embarking on an undertaking. Several headless figurines found at Inamgaon have been compared with Goddess *Visira* of the *Mahabharata*. Fire-worship seems to have been a very widespread phenomenon among the Chalcolithic people. Fire-altars have been found from a large number of Chalcolithic sites during the course of excavations.

The occurence of pots and other funerary objects found along with the burials of the Malwa and Jorwe people indicate that people had a belief in life after death.

The Chalcolithic cultures flourished during the third millennium and second millennium B.C. A large number of settlements like Kayatha, Prabhas, Ahar, Balathal, Prakash and Nevasa were deserted, to be reoccupied after four to six centuries later. It has been postulated that these cultures declined due to decline in rainfall which made it hard for the agricultural communities to sustain .

Technology

The Chalcolithic farmers had made considerable progress in ceramic as well as metal technology. The painted pottery was well made and well fired in kiln. It was fired at a temperature between 500-700° C. In metal tools we find axes, chisels, bangles, beads, hooks, etc. which were mostly made of copper. The copper was obtained, perhaps, from the Khetri mines of Rajasthan. Gold ornaments were extremely rare and have been found only in the Jorwe culture. An ear ornament has been found from Prabhas also. The find of crucibles and pairs of tongs of copper at Inamgaon shows the working of goldsmiths. Chalcedony drills were used for perforating beads of semiprecious stones. Lime was prepared out of *Kankar* and used for various purposes like painting houses and lining the storage bins, etc.

Copper Hoard Culture

Since the first reported discovery of a copper harpoon from Bithur in Kanpur district in 1822, nearly one thousand copper objects have been found from

almost 90 localities in various parts of India. As these copper objects have mostly been found in hoards, they are known as Copper Hoards. The largest hoard from Gungeria (Madhya Pradesh) comprises 424 pieces of copper objects and 102 thin sheets of silver. The main types of objects are various kinds of celts, harpoons, antennae swords, rings and anthropomorphs. We find that harpoons, antennae swords and anthropomorphs are basically confined to Uttar Pradesh while various kinds of celts, rings and other objects are found from such diverse geographical areas as Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Maharashtra. Scientific analysis of these copper objects show that they were made in open or closed moulds. These are generally made of pure copper, although very insignificant quantities of alloys have been noticed in some. The source of metal for these copper hoards appears to the Khetri copper mines as well as hilly regions of Almora District in Uttaranchal.

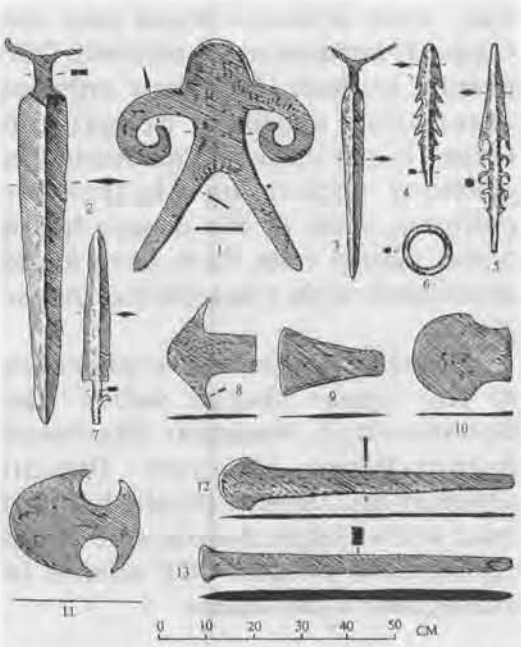


Fig. 7.5 *Copper Hoard Objects*
1. Anthropomorph, 2-3. Antennae Swords, 4-5, 7 Harpoons, 6, Ring, 8-11, Celts, 12-13 Bar Celts

The Copper Hoards include weapons and tools as well as objects of worship. The harpoons and antennae swords are likely to have been used as weapons, while various kinds of celts and axes may have been used as tools. Bar celts appear to have been used for mining ores. The anthropomorphs, weighing quite a few kilos and measuring upto 45 cm. in length and 43 cm. in width, were possibly objects of worship. Even today all over northern India tiny anthropomorphs of the size of 4-10 cm. are worshipped as *Shani devata.*

It is difficult to say as to who were the authors of these Copper Hoards. In the Gangetic plains a few pieces of these copper hoards have been found associated with Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP), discussed below.

OCP Culture

Almost contemporary to the later half of the Mature Harappan civilization, there flourished a culture in the upper Gangetic plains which is identified by the use of pottery with bright red slip

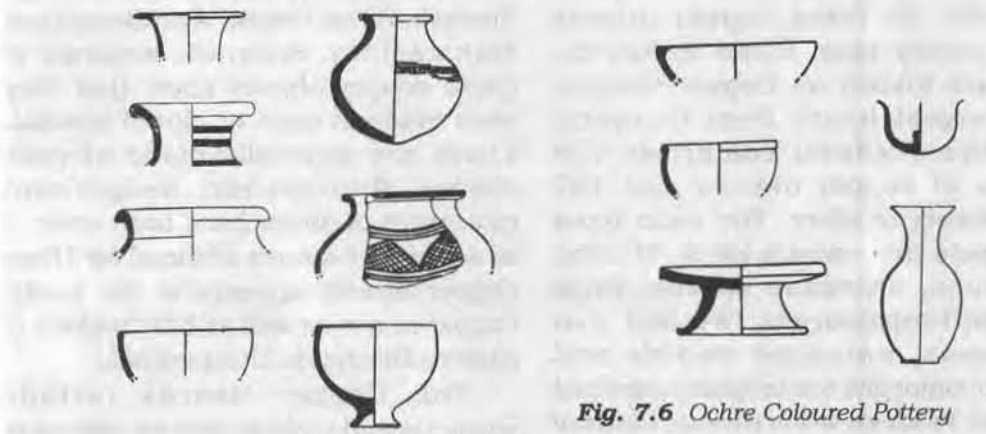


Fig. 7.6 *Ochre Coloured Pottery*

and painted in black. This pottery has been found all over upper Gangetic plains. During the course of excavation in the region it has been found that the sites yielding this pottery have suffered from extensive floods. Many scholars think that the entire upper Gangetic plains was for some length of time submerged under water. The OCP people used copper tools and cultivated rice, barley, gram and *khaseri*. The OCP shares many shapes with the Harappan ware.

During the course of excavations, Copper Hoard objects were found in association with OCP deposit at Saipai, in District Etah. Also, from almost all the places in Ganga-Yamuna *doab* from where Copper Hoards have been found, the OCP has also been found. Due to this, some scholars think that the Copper Hoards are associated with OCP people, in doab. But their cultural association in Bihar, Bengal and Orissa is not clear. As mentioned in previous section on Chalcolithic cultures, some of the copper hoard types, mainly celts, have been found associated with Chalcolithic people also.

Besides, there are some other sites of the upper Ganga valley like Bahadarabad, Nasirpur (Hardwar) Rajpur-Parsu (Meerut) Bisauli (Badaun) and Baheria (Shahjahanpur) from where copper hoards were found earlier also yielded OCP sherds in subsequent explorations.

Exercises

1. Explain the following:
   Chalcolithic, OCP, Anthropomorphs, Copper Hoards.
2. Write short notes on:
   (i) Chalcolithic technology
   (ii) Important Chalcolithic cultures
   (iii) Copper Hoards
3. How is the Chalcolithic culture different from the Neolithic culture?
4. Describe the religious beliefs of Chalcolithic people.

Things to Do

- Locate on the outline map of India some important Chalcolithic sites.
- Draw on your sketch book some vessels like glass, cups and vase.

Chapter 8

The Harappan Civilization

At the time of partition of India in 1947, barely 40 settlements belonging to this civilization were known. Researches carried out during the last 50 years have altered the picture completely.

THE Harappan civilization was discovered in 1920-21 following the excavations by R.D. Banerjee at Mohenjodaro and by D.R. Salini at Harappa. Since at that time the remains of the civilization were found only in the Indus valley, it came to be known also as the Indus civilization. A culture may also be named after the site from where it came to be known for the first time. Since, it was at Harappa that the relics of this civilization were first noticed, it

Fig. 8.1 *The Extent of the Harappan Civilization and its Important Sites*

is also known as the Harappan civilization. At the time of partition of India in 1947, barely 40 settlements belonging to this civilization were known. Researches carried out during the last 50 years have altered the picture completely. Now about 1400 settlements belonging to the different phases of this culture are known from parts of India. In terms of political boundaries of today, of these 1400 sites nearly 925 settlements are in India and 475 in Pakistan. This ancient civilization of India, like any other, cannot properly be studied on the basis of its present day political boundaries. The geographical distribution should be its basis.

The 1400 settlements, discovered so far are distributed over a very wide geographical area. Its known extent in the west is upto Sutkagendor in Baluchistan; Alamgirpur in Meerut District (Uttar Pradesh) in the east; Daimabad (Ahmadnagar District, Maharashtra) in south; and Manda (Akhnoor District, Jammu and Kashmir) in the north, covering an area of almost 1600 km. east-west and 1400 km. north-south. The total geographical area over which this civilization flourished is more than 20 times of the area of Egyptian and more than 12 times of the area of Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations combined. It covers an area of about 12,50,000 sq. km. These settlements are mostly located on river banks.

When we look at the distribution pattern of these settlements in terms of rivers, we find that (i) only 40 settlements are located on the Indus and its tributaries and (ii) as many as 1,100 (80%) settlements are located on the vast plain between the Indus and the Ganga, comprising mainly the Saraswati river system which is dry today, and (iii) about 250 settlements are found in India beyond the Saraswati river system a number of them in Gujarat, and a few in Maharashtra.

It is clear from the above distribution pattern of settlements that the focus of Harappan civilization was not the Indus but the Saraswati river and its tributaries which flowed between the Indus and the Ganga. It is because of this reason that some scholars call it Indus-Saraswati civilization, and few prefer the nomenclature Saraswati civilization.

Most of the 1400 settlements belonging to this civilization can be classified as small villages (which are upto 10 hectares), a few larger towns and small cities (10 to 50 hectares). Some of the settlements like Mohenjodaro (+250 hectares), Harappa (+150 hectares), Ganawariwala (+80 hectares) and Rakhigarhi (+80 hectares), Kalibangan (+100 hectares), and Dholavira (+100 hectares) can easily be classed as large cities. The first five are inland centres located approximately at an equidistance in a zigzag pattern that covers Indus and Saraswati river plain. The last two are located in Rann of Kachchha.

Each of these cities were surrounded by vast agricultural lands, rivers and forest that were inhabited by scattered farming and pastoral communities and bands of hunters food-gatherers.

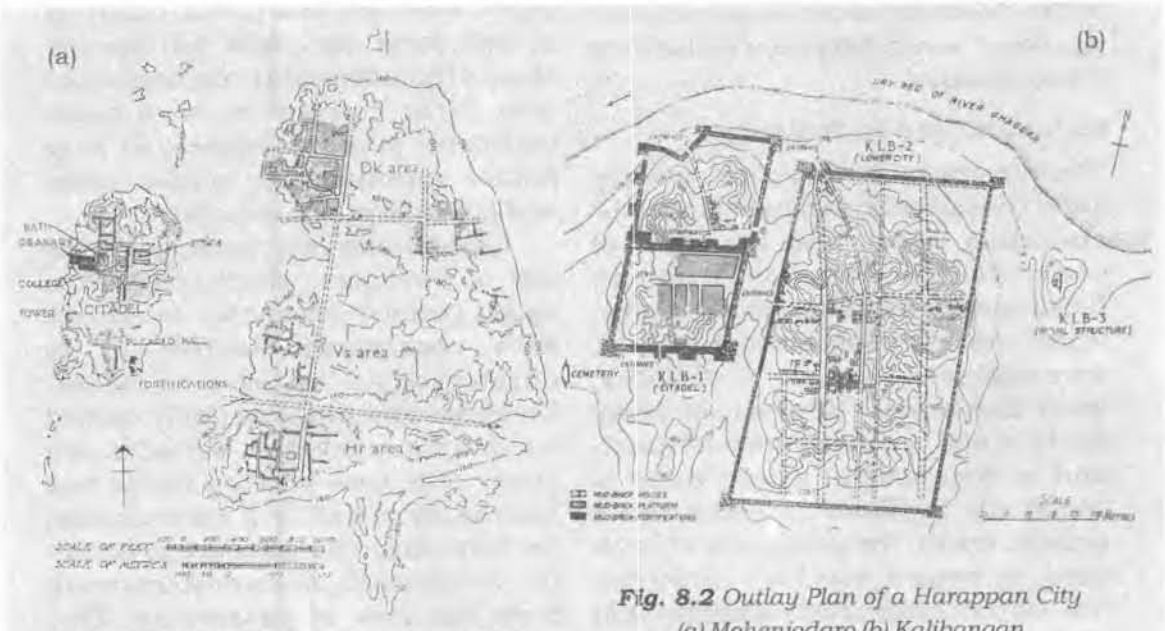
Major excavations undertaken at the sites of Mohenjodaro, Harappa Kalibangan, Lothal, Surkotada, Dholavira etc. have given us a fair idea about the various aspects like town planning, economy, technology, religion etc. of this civilization.

Town Planning

The overall layout of the Indus-Saraswati cities is distinguished by the orientation of streets and buildings, according to the cardinal directions — east-west, and north-south. The idea of settlement planning did not appear suddenly with the first large cities but was already well established in earlier period as has been revealed from the excavations at Kot Diji, Kalibangan, Harappa, Rahman Dheri, Nausharo etc. The basic layout at all these settlements was established along a grid that was defined by large streets running north-south and east-west and fortification all around.

Earlier it was thought that all cities were having a standard division into a high western citadel and a lower town to the east reflecting the division of the cities into rulers and the service communities, with the crafts workshops located in the lower city. But this interpretation is not correct because large public buildings, market areas, large and small private houses as well as crafts workshops have been found in all areas.

Each city comprised a series of walled sectors or mounds, oriented in different direction. Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Kalibangan have a high rectangular mound on the west and



MOHENJODARO : CITADEL AND LOWER TOWN

Fig. 8.2 *Outlay Plan of a Harappan City*
(a) Mohenjodaro (b) Kalibangan

extensive mound to the north, south and the east. But at the sites like Dholavira and Banavali there was only a single walled mound internally divided into three or four walled sectors.

The excavations at the Harappan city sites like Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Kalibangan, Surkotada show that there were large gateways at various entry points of the city. These gateways are seen even in the inner fortification areas also. At Dholavira a large inscription, possibly a fallen signboard, was found close to the main gateway. The letters of the inscription are the largest example of writing ever discovered from any Harappan city, is made from white gypsum paste inlay set into a wooden plank. Ten symbols each measuring approximately 37 cm. high and 25 to 27 cm. wide proclaimed some name or title. Mounted above the gateway the signboard would have been visible from a long distance.

Materials used in Buildings

The houses built by people usually show considerable variation in the raw materials used and the style of construction. The most common building materials in the alluvial plains, where most settlements are located, were mud-bricks and kiln-fired-bricks, wood and reeds. However, in rocky foothills and on the Islands of Kutch and in Saurashtra, where stone is commonly available, dressed stone replaced bricks. The average size of brick used for houses was 7½ ×15×30 cm. but for the construction of fortification walls the size of the brick was of bigger size viz. 10×20×40 cm. Both sizes of bricks have identical proportions 1:2:4, that the width is double the thickness and the length four times, the thickness.

The doors windows were made of wood and mats. The floors of houses were generally hard-packed earth that was often plastered. Bathing areas and drains were made with baked bricks or stone. Some rooms were paved with bricks or fired terracotta cakes. Very few actual roof fragments have been recovered. They were probably made of wooden beams covered with reeds and packed clay. In rare instances timber also seems to have formed a semi-structural frame or lacing for brickwork.

Types of Buildings

Excavations have uncovered many types of houses and public buildings at both large and small settlements. Most of the architecture can be grouped into three categories, with some variations: (i) private houses, (ii) large houses surrounded by smaller units, and (iii) large public structures.

Considerable variation is seen in the size of dwellings, which range from single roomed tenements to houses with courtyards having up to dozen rooms of varying sizes. Doorways and windows rarely opened out into the main street, but faced side lanes. The view into the house was blocked by a wall or a room around the front door. This was done to protect the activities in the central courtyard from the view of passers-by. This pattern is still maintained in

traditional houses throughout the Indo-Gangetic plains.

Many houses were at least two storied and some scholars think that some of the houses may have been three storied. Hearths were commonly found in the rooms. Almost every house had a bathroom, and in some cases there is evidence of bathrooms on the first floor. The doors were made with wooden frames and a brick socket set in the threshold served as door pivot. Some of the doors seem to have been painted and possibly carved with simple ornamentation. The windows were small at first and second stories. The adjacent houses were separated by a narrow space of "no man's land". Almost all the big houses had a well within their courtyard. Deep grooves on the bricks at the top edge of the well show that ropes were used to lift the water up, probably with leather or wooden buckets.

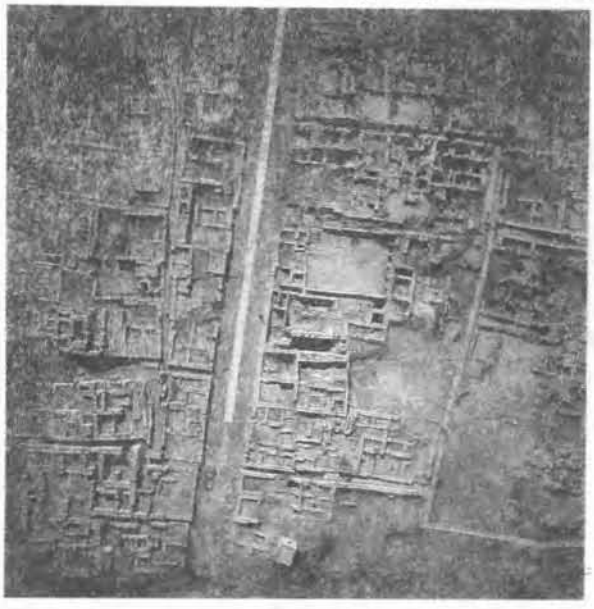


Fig. 8.3 *Ariel View of Excavated Citadel Area of Mohenjodaro*

Public Buildings

In several cities some large and distinct structures have been found. Their special nature is seen in their plan and in their construction. Here we shall confine ourselves only to a few structures.

Fig. 8.4 *The Great Bath of Mohenjodaro*

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the citadel mound at Mohenjodaro is the Great Bath. This finely built brick structure measures 12 m by 7m, and is nearly 3m deep from the surrounding pavement. It is approached at either end by flights of steps. The floor of the bath was constructed of sawn bricks set on edge in gypsum mortar, with a layer of bitumen sandwiched between the inner and outer brick layers. Water was evidently supplied by a large well in an adjacent room, and an outlet from one corner of the bath led to a high corbelled drain disgorging on the west side of the mound. Surrounding the bath were

porticos and sets of rooms, while a stairway led to an upper storey. It has been generally agreed that this bath was linked with some sort of ritual bathing which has been very common in Indian life right from the ancient times till today.

Immediately to the west of the Great Bath at Mohenjodaro is a group of 27 blocks of brickwork criss-crossed by narrow lanes. Overall it measures 50 m. east-west and 27 m. north-south. Somewhat similar structures have been found at Harappa, Kalibangan and Lothal. These structures have been identified as granaries which were used for storing grains. To the south of granaries at Harappa lay working platforms consisting of the rows of circular brick platforms. During the course of excavation, impression of a large wooden mortar was found placed in the centre of one of these circular brick platforms. Such wooden mortars are used in many parts of the world to remove the husk from the grain.

An important structure is the dockyard found at Lothal. It is a large structure measuring 223 m. in length, 35 m. in width and 8 m. in depth, provided with an inlet channel (12,30 m. wide) in the eastern wall and a spillway. The inlet channel was connected to a river. By its side is a 240 m. long and 21.6 m wide wharf. Most scholars have identified this structure as a dockyard where ships and boats came for loading and unloading of goods. In view of the fact that a large number of seals have been found in a warehouse close to the dockyard, scholars think that Lothal was a major trading centre of the Harappan civilization.

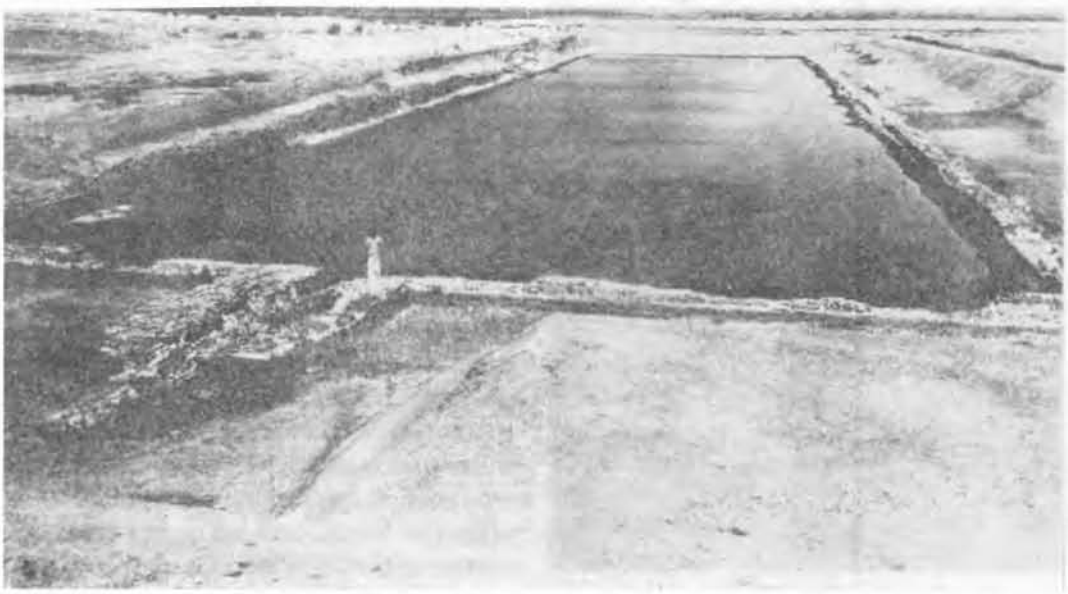


Fig. 8.5 *Dockyard at Lothal*

Streets and Drains

Well laid-out streets and side lanes equipped with drains are the most outstanding features of the Harappan civilization.

The towns were well planned and the streets cut each other on the right angles. Even the width of these streets were in a set ratio. If the narrowest lane was one unit in width, the other streets were twice, thrice and so on in width. Further, the civic sense of people in this civilization was such that during the hey-day of the civilization, no encroachment on the streets was to be seen. According to scholars, such town-planning was not seen even in the nineteenth century London and Paris.

Even smaller towns and villages had impressive drainage systems. This indicates that people had a great civic sense of sanitation and care for health and hygiene. Small drains made of burnt bricks were connected with bathing platforms and latrines of private houses joined the medium-sized drains in the side streets. These drains ran into larger sewers in the main streets which were covered with bricks or dressed stone blocks. Corbelled-arch drains have also been found. One of them is almost 6 ft. deep which functioned as main drain taking all the waste water out of the town. At regular intervals along the main sewage drains were rectangular sump pits for collecting waste and these were regularly cleaned.

Crafts and Industries

Although the Harappan civilization is referred to as a bronze age civilization, mostly unalloyed copper was used for manufacturing artefacts, and only rarely tin was alloyed in copper to make bronze. Tools and weapons were simple in form. They included flat-axes, chisels, arrowhead, spearheads, knives, saws, razors, and fish-hooks. People also made copper and bronze vessels. They made small plates and weights of lead, and gold and silver jewellery of considerable sophistication.

The Harappans continued to use knives of chert blades also. Some of these chert blades are the finest examples known from any early culture. A great skill and expertise is seen in precious and semi-precious stone beads and weights. Long barrel shaped cornelian beads (upto 10 cm. long) are the finest examples of craftsmanship.

Steatite was used for making a variety of objects like seals, beads, bracelets, buttons, vessels, etc. but its use in making faience (a form of glass) is particularly noteworthy. In this material beads, amulets, sealings and even animal models have been found.

In the Harappan civilization, gold objects occur in the form of beads, pendants, amulets, brooches, and

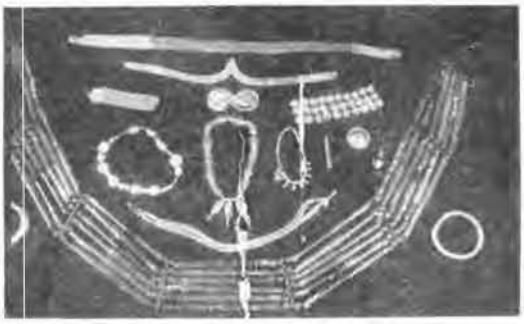


Fig. 8.6 *Ornaments*

other small ornaments. The Harappan gold is of light colour indicating high silver content. On the basis of alloys, it has been suggested that gold may have come from Karnataka. Silver was relatively more common than gold which is indicated by the occurrence of a number of large vessels and other objects.

Mature Harappan pottery represents a blend of the ceramic tradition of the pre-Harappan culture of both west of the Indus region as well as of the Saraswati area. The pottery technology was quite advanced. Most of the pots were wheel-made. Big storage jars were also produced. Pots were beautifully painted in black on the bright red surface with geometric designs, plants, animals, and a few paintings seem to depict scenes from stories.

More than 2500 seals have been found. These are made of steatite. They mostly depict a single animal–unicorn bull, elephant, rhinoceros etc.–but some also depict trees, semi-human and human figurines, in some cases participating in a ceremony.

Shell working was another flourishing industry. Artisans, settlements close to the sea manufactured shell ornaments like pendants, rings, bracelets, inlays, beads etc., beside objects as bowls, ladles and gamesmen.

Trade and Commerce

In the Harappan civilization, the elaborate social structure and the standard of living must have been achieved by a highly developed system of communication and strong economy. In this, intensive agricultural production and large-scale trade played significant roles. In the beginning, trade must have been internal, i.e. between one zone and another, and later external trade also developed. Agricultural produce, industrial raw material, like copper ores, stone, semi precious shells, etc. were traded. Besides the raw material, finished products of metals (pots and pans, weapon, etc.), precious and semi-precious stones (beads, pendants, amulets etc.) ornaments of gold and silver were also traded to various areas. Copper may have been procured from Khetri mines of Rajasthan, chert blades from Rohri hills of Sindh, carnelian beads from Gujarat and Sindh, lead from south India, lapis-lazuli from Kashmir and Afghanistan, turquoise and jade from central Asia or Iran, amethyst from Maharashtra, and agate, chalcedony, and carnelian from Saurashtra.

The occurrence of mature Harappan seals and other artefacts in contemporary Mesopotamian civilization, and some of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian objects in Harappan civilization, and the evidence of Mesopotamian documents, establish that the Harappans had trading relationship with that land.

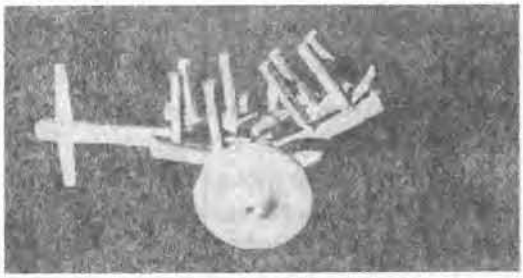
Weights and Measures

The trade, both long as well as short distance, implies a regulation of exchange and of weights and measures.

Harappan weights and measures were cubical and spherical in shape and were made of chert, jasper and agate. The weights proceed in a series, first doubling, from 1,2,4,8, to 64, then going to 160; and from then on in decimal multiples of sixteen, 320, 640, 1600, 6400 (1600×4), 8000 (1600×5) and 128,000 (i.e. 16000 × 8). Interestingly, the tradition of 16 or its multiples continued in India till 1950s. Sixteen *chhatank* made a *ser*, and 16 *annas* made one rupee. The measures of length was based upon a foot of 37.6 cm. and a cubit of 51.8 to 53. 6 cm.

Transport and Travel

Representations of ships and boats are found on some seals and as graffiti an pottery from Harappa and Mohenjodaro. A terracotta model of a



(a) Bullock cart

(b) Boat depicted on seals

***Fig. 8.7** Modes of Transport*

ship or a boat, with stick-impressed socket for the mast and eyeholes for fixing oars has been found from Lothal. The boats depicted on seals and pottery resemble the ones used today in Sindh and Punjab areas. Travel and transport were carried on through ships and boats. For the overland transport bullock-carts and pack animals like bull, camel, ass etc. were used. The terracotta models of bullock-cart and cart tracks found on roads from various sites indicate that carts used in those days were in size and shape practically like the present day ones.

Agriculture

The granaries at some Harappan cities clearly suggest that cereals were produced in such large quantities that not only were all the immediate needs

***Fig. 8.8** The Plough Field Excavated at Kalibangan*

of people duly met with, but there was also enough reserve to face any future emergency.

The principal cereals seem to have been wheat and barley. Rice, though known, was a favoured grain. Six varieties of millets including *ragi*,

kodon, sanwa, and *jowar* were cultivated, as also peas and beans. Remains of rice have been found mainly from Gujarat and Haryana areas. Other crops include dates, varieties of legumes, sesame and mustard. Fragments of cotton cloth found at Mohenjodaro and other sites show that cotton was also grown. Cotton has been found at Mehrgarh at least 2000 years before the mature phase of the Civilization. This is the oldest evidence of cotton in the world.

Agriculture was generally practised along the river banks most of which were flooded during the summer and monsoons. The flood deposited every year fresh alluvial silt which is highly productive and for which no major furrowing and certainly no manures and irrigation are required. The cultivated field excavated at Kalibangan (period I) shows crisscross furrow-marks indicating that two crops were grown simultaneously. This method is followed even today in the Rajasthan, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh.

For tilling fields, wooden plough with a copper or wooden ploughshare was used. Terracotta models of the plough have been found at Mohenjodaro and Banawali. Harvesting of crops would have been done with copper sickles as well as stone blades hafted in wood.

The range of animals domesticated by the Harappan people is quite large. Bones of several animals have been found in excavations. Skeletal remains include sheep, goat, bull, buffalo, elephant, camel, pig, dog and cat, which were all domesticated. A large number of animal have been depicted on the seals. These include sheep, goat, humped bull, buffalo, elephant, etc. Bones of wild animals like spotted deer, sambhar deer, hog deer, wild pig, etc. are also found which evidently were hunted for food. Several types of birds as well as fishes were also hunted for food.

The bones of camels have been found in large number from various sites but the animal is not depicted on seals. Bones of horses have been reported from Lothal, Surkotada, Kalibangan and several other sites. Terracotta figurines of the horse have been found at Nausharo and Lothal. But no unambiguous depiction of this animal on seal has so far been found.

Arts

A large variety of objects such as seals, stone statues, terracotta, etc. are superb examples of art activities. The most outstanding pieces are a yogi from Mohenjodaro and two small figurines from Harappa. Bronzes are rare, the most famous being a small female statue of about 11.5 cm. in height identified as dancing girl, from Mohenjodaro. Significantly, this has been made by the lost wax method of casting. Daimabad bronze animals workmanship most probably belong to Harappan period. The red sandstone torso found at Harappa is made of detachable limbs and head and the grey stone torso perhaps shows a dancing figure. Both these are so realistic

that had they not been found in archaeological excavations none would believe that they belong to the Harappan period.

Harappan people produced a large number of terracotta figurines which were handmade. The figurines include humans, animals, birds, monkeys, dogs, sheep and cattle. Figurines of both humped and humpless bulls are found.

The largest number of seals depict unicorn. But the most artistic depictions are the figures of humped bull. Other animals are elephants, tigers, rhinoceros, ram, etc. Humans are also occasionally depicted.

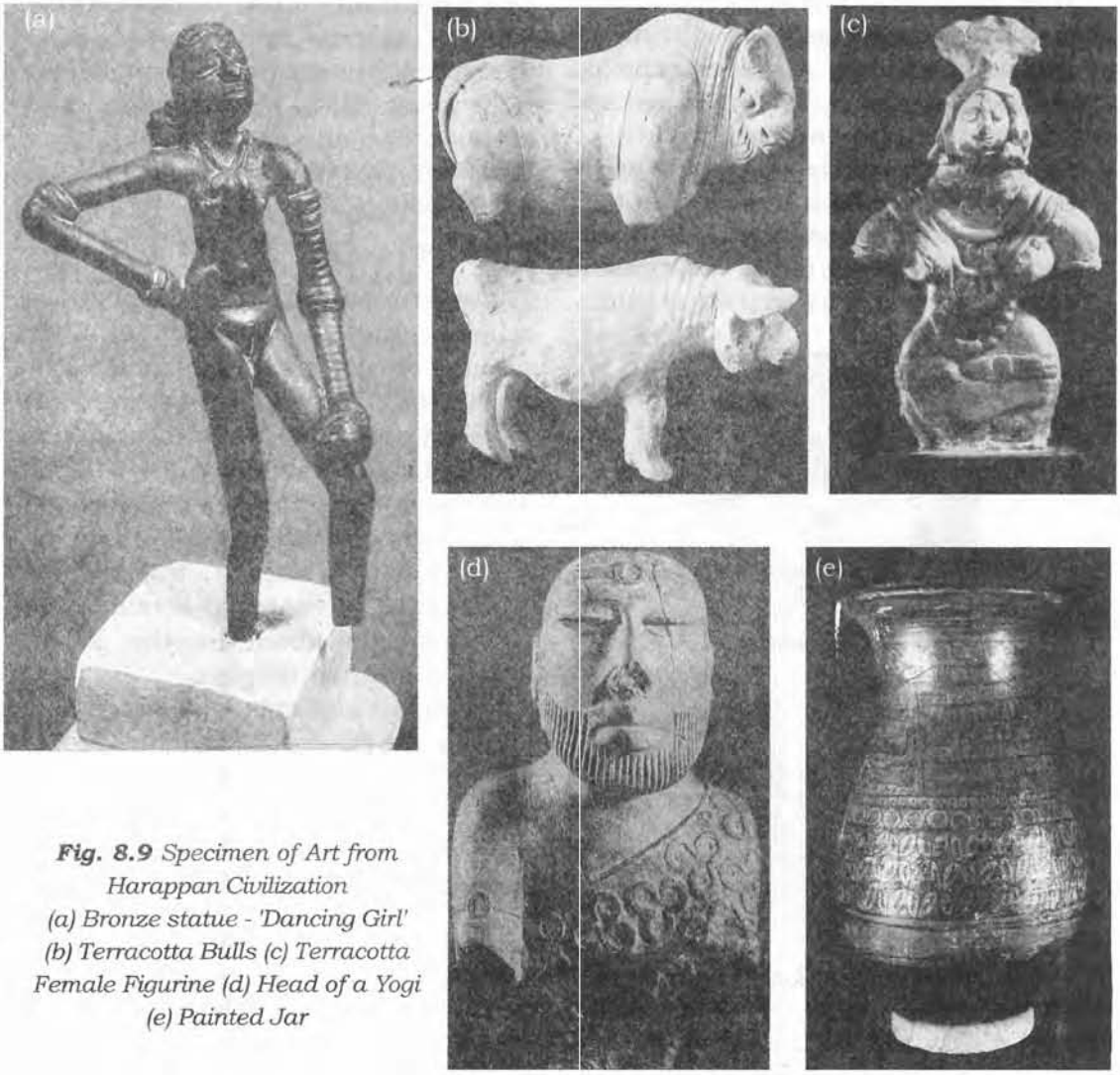


Fig. 8.9 *Specimen of Art from Harappan Civilization*
(a) Bronze statue - 'Dancing Girl'
(b) Terracotta Bulls (c) Terracotta Female Figurine (d) Head of a Yogi
(e) Painted Jar

As for the evidence of paintings we have it only on pottery. Unfortunately no wall paintings, even if there were any, have survived.

Script

The language of Harappans is at present still unknown and must remain so until the Harappan script is read. Though several attempts have been made but none has been convincing and acceptable to all. Some scholars connect it to Dravidian languages and others to Indo-Aryan and Sanskrit.

There are nearly 400 specimens of Harappan signs on seals and other materials such as copper tablets, axes, and pottery. Most of the inscriptions on seals are small, a group of few letters. A few bear only one single sign. The Harappan script has 400 to 500 signs and its is generally agreed that it is not an alphabetic form of writing. Some scholars opine that Harappan inscriptions present a logosyllablic writing system, where a sequence of two or more signs would represent either a complete word, a syllable or a sound and sometimes even a sentence of several words and grammatical indicators. The script was written from right to left. When the inscription was of more than one line it could be first line from right to left and second from left to right.

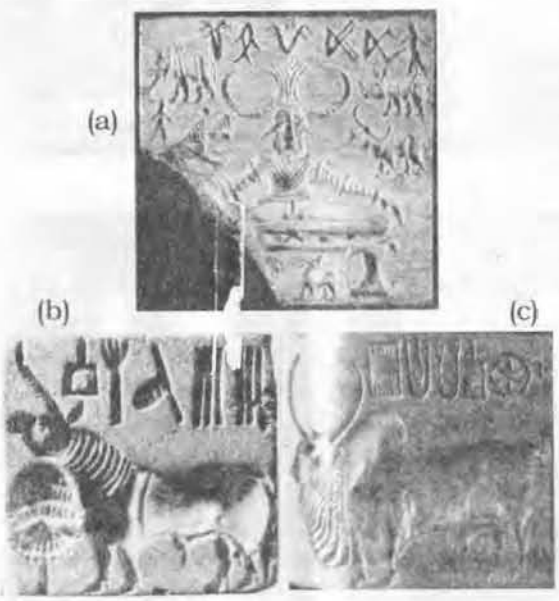


Fig. **8.10** *(a) Seal popularily known as Siva Pasupati (b) and (c) Other seals with Harappan Script*

Religion

There are generally two aspects of religion: one conceptual or philosophical, and the other, practical or ritualistic. The former is enshrined in metaphysical texts while the latter is reflected in the material remains. Since we have not been able to decipher the script it is difficult to talk about the metaphysical aspect, but due to abundance of material remains we have some idea about the other aspect of the Harappan religion.

From the available evidence we may say that the religion of the Indus people comprised: (i) the worship of the Mother Goddess (ii) the worship of a male deity, probably of Siva: (iii) worship of animals, natural, semi-human, or fabulous; (iv) worship of trees in their natural state or of their indwelling spirits; (v) worship of inanimate stones or other objects, of *linga* and *yoni* symbols; (vi) chrematheism as

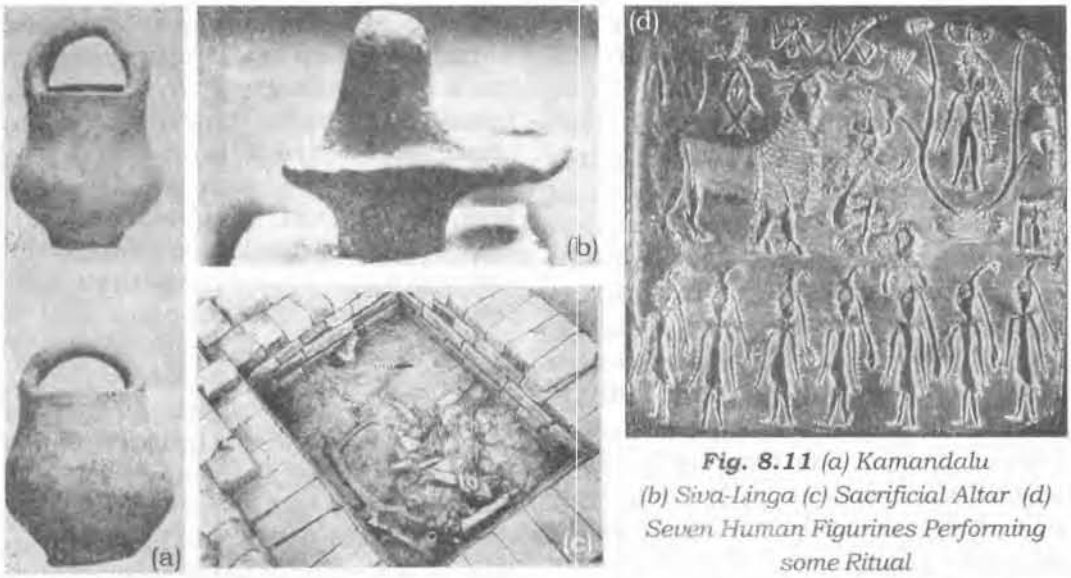


Fig. 8.11 *(a) Kamandalu (b) Siva-Linga (c) Sacrificial Altar (d) Seven Human Figurines Performing some Ritual*

illustrated in the worship of the sacred "incense-burners"; (vii) faith in amulets and charms indicative of *demonophobia*: and (viii) practice of *yoga*. These characteristics suggest that this religion was mainly of an indigenous growth and "the lineal progenitor of Hinduism", which is characterised by most of these features.

A large number of female figurines of terracotta have been discovered. The accepted view is that these are representations of the Great Mother Goddess. A striking oblong sealing found at Harappa represents the Earth or Mother Goddess, with a plant growing from her womb. Also depicted are a man with a knife in hand, and a woman with raised hands.

A male deity, "the prototype of the historic *Siva*," is portrayed on a seal with three faces, seated on a low throne in the typical posture of a *Yogi*, with two animals on each side – elephant and tiger on right and rhinoceros and buffalo on left, and two deer standing under the throne. The depiction shows Siva as *Pasupati*. There is also the last characteristic of the historic Siva in this figure, a pair of horns crowning his head with a central bump which appears like the *trisula* or trident of the Saivas. Another seal depicts a deity in the same posture of a *Yoga*, with a Naga kneeling in prayer to him with uplifted hands on either side of him.

Some *linga* and *yoni* like objects have been found. Some scholars opined that these were not *linga* and *yonis* but gamesmen. However, the find of a terracotta piece from Kalibangan having *linga* and *yoni* in one piece, like the ones in the historical period, show that these were *linga and yoni* meant for worship. Whether they were worshipped independently or are

symbolic representation of Siva and Sakti respectively, cannot be ascertained.

There is also evidence of tree-worship in two forms. In one, the tree was worshipped in its natural form. In the other, what was worshipped was not the tree but its indwelling spirit. A remarkable seal found at Mohenjodaro represents a deity, standing between two branches of a *pipal* tree. The worship of the deity is indicated by a line of seven human figures and by the figure of a half-kneeling suppliant with long hair, behind whom is a goat, with a human face. The continuance of this religious tradition is found in the sculptures of Bharhut and Sanchi showing the Yakshis as Dryads.

Fig. 8.12 *(a) Terracotta Yogic Figurines in different Asanas (b) Seal Depicting a Yogi (c) Swastika*

Evidence of animal worship is also found in the animals represented on seals and sealings, or in terracotta, faience, and stone figurines. Firstly, there are mythical and composite creatures; e.g. human faced goat or part ram or goat, part bull and part elephant, three-headed chimeras, semi-human semi-bovine creatures. The most common depiction an seal is unicorn, which is perhaps mythical. Thirdly, there are the natural animals, such as (i) the water buffalo, (ii) the gaur or Indian bison, (iii) the Indian humped bull or zebu, (iv) the rhinoceros, (v) a short-horned humpless bull (vi) the tiger, and (vii) the Indian elephant. In later period some of these animal figure as the vehicles of Hindu deities, e.g. the bull of Siva, the lion of Durga, and the buffalo of Yama, the elephant of Indra.

A large number of 'fire-altars' have been found from sites in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana. At Kalibangan, Lothal, and Banawali a number of 'fire-altars' have been found which seem to have been used as sacrificial altars. Besides these the *Swastika*, a sacred symbol with Hindus, Buddhists and Jaina has been depicted on seals, painting and graffiti, etc.

There is yet another aspect of the Harappan people that needs consideration. A large number of terracotta figurines depict the individuals in various yogic postures (*asanas*) indicating thereby that the Harappans practised yoga.

Social Stratification and Political setup

The Harappan society seems to have been divided into three sections, viz. an

elite class associated with the Citadel, a well-to-do middle class, and a relatively weaker section, occupying the lower town which were generally fortified. Some of the craftsmen and labourers resided outside the fortified area. Whether these divisions were based purely on economic factors or had a socio-religious basis we cannot say. At Kalibangan it appears that the priests resided in the upper part of the citadel and performed rituals on fire altars in the lower part of it.

It is difficult to be sure of the kind of political setup that prevailed at the time of the Harappan civilization. An Indus empire is often talked about, implying that the entire area was administered from one capital, with a few regional administrative centres or provincial capitals. However, it is also possible that there were several independent states or kingdoms each with cities like Mohenjodaro in Sindh, Harappa in Punjab, Kalibangan in Rajasthan, Lothal in Gujarat as their capitals. It may be recalled that during the first millennium B.C. though the archaeological culture all over northern India was almost the same, yet the area was divided into sixteen *Mahajanapadas* each independent with its own capital.

Disposal of the Dead

Scattered burials, as well as discreet cemeteries, have been found at many major sites. The skeletal remains are few in comparison to the size of settlements and the population that may have lived on them. Obviously, cremation was also practised. This is proved by many cinerary urns or other receptacles containing calcined human bones and ashes together with vessel offerings for the use of dead person in the next life. Only certain groups practised burials. The general practice was that skeletons were placed in an extended position with the head towards the north. Earthen pots containing food grains, etc. were placed in the grave and, in some cases, the body was buried with ornaments.

Chronology

When the Harappan civilization was first recognised in 1920s the dating was done mainly on the basis of the findings of Harappan seals in Ur and Kish in Mesopotamia. On that basis Marshall suggested that Harappan civilization flourished between 3250 and 2750 B.C. Wheeler dated it to 2500–1500 B.C. Since then radio-carbon dating method has been invented and on the basis of radio-carbon dating of this civilization following chronology emerges:

Early Harappan Phase	:	c. 3500 – 2600 B.C.
Mature Harappan Phase	:	c. 2600 – 1900 B.C.
Late Harappan Phase	:	c. 1900 – 1300 B.C.

Speaking of the Mature Harappan period, 700 years is an extremely long time, spanning nearly 30 generations. Many changes in social organisation, politics, language and even religion would have taken place during this long period. We know that in contemporary Egypt and Mesopotamia many kingdoms rose and fell within a period of even 100 years.

After about 1900 B.C. the uniformity of the Harappan civilization weakened and regional variations started emerging.

Decline

John Marshall and many other scholars, on the basis of evidence available from the sites along the Indus river, felt that this civilization declined due to environmental degradation. The cutting of forests for agricultural land and timber for fuel and over-exploitation of resources, etc. resulted in the land to become barren and in the silting of rivers. Due to all this, flood, drought and famine must have become a recurring feature which finally led to its decline. Wheeler who dated the Harappan civilization between 2500 and 1500 B.C. opined that it was destroyed by the 'barabarian' Aryans who came to India in about 1500 B.C. Later researches proved that Wheeler's thesis of Aryan being destroyers of the Harappan civilization was a myth. In fact, there is no archaeological or biological evidence for invasion or mass migration from west or central Asia to the Indus or Saraswati valleys between 5000 and 800 B.C. All skeletons found during this period belong to the same group of people.

The Harappan civilization was spread over a large area, and the causes of its decline in all the regions can not be one and the same. While in the Saraswati region it declined mainly due to shifting of river channels, along the Indus it declined largely due to recurring floods. The rainfall declined in general which affected the agriculture, the main economic resource. With the decline in economic conditions all other institutions like trade and commerce, administrative and political structures, civic amenities, etc. also declined over a period of time.

However, it must be emphasised that Harappan civilization did not disappear suddenly. Archaeological evidence shows that the decline was gradual and slow which is witnessed over a period of almost six hundred years from *c.* 1900-1300 B.C.

Late Harappan Cultures

Once the decline of the Harappan civilization set in what we see is the gradual disappearance of hallmarks of urban phase of this civilization. Features such as town-planning, grid-patterns, drainage system, standard weights and measures etc. slowly disappear and a kind of ruralisation takes place with distinctive regional variations. Three regions can be broadly detected – (i) north Indian late Harappan culture which includes the areas of Punjab, Harayana, western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Pakistan part of Punjab; (ii) Gujarat and Maharashtra and (iii) Baluchistan. These cultures interacted with the then existing Chalcolithic cultures of different regions.

In all these three areas certain residual features like some shapes of pottery, bronze tools, beads and other smaller objects provide their link with Harappan civilization. Though the

Harappan civilization disappeared by about 1300 B.C., number of cultural traits developed in this civilization can be seen as a part of our daily cultural and material life, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Exercises

1. Discuss the extent and settlements of the Harappan civilization. Why is it called the Harappan civilization?
2. Describe the characteristic features of town planning of the Harappan civilization.
3. Describe the developments in the field of crafts and industries during the Harappan period.
4. Write a note on the contact of Harappans with contemporary civilizations.
5. Discuss the economy of the Harappans.
6. Describe the art and architecture during the Harappan period.
7. Describe the religious beliefs of the Harappan people. Mention some of the characteristic features of Harappan religion which are still continuing.
8. What were the causes for the decline of the Harappan civilization?
9. Write short notes on:
   (i) Chronology of the Harappan civilization
   (ii) Late Harappan culture
   (iii) Harappan weights and measures
   (iv) Harappan script

Things to Do

- On an Outline Map show the extent of the Harappan civilization with some important sites.
- Collect photographs of seals and make a chart of signs and figures of these seals.

CHAPTER 9

THE VEDIC CIVILIZATION

THE *Vedas* are neither any individual religious work nor a collection of definite number of books compiled at a particular time. The Vedic literature had grown in the course of many centuries and was handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.

BEFORE we proceed to discuss the Vedic civilization it will be useful to have some idea about its source – the Vedic literature. The most important source are the *Vedas*. *Veda* means "knowledge". The *Vedas* are neither any individual religious work nor a collection of definite number of books compiled at a particular time. The Vedic literature had grown in the course of many centuries and was handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. It consists of three successive classes of literary creations. Some of these still exist, but many have been completely lost for ever. These three classes are :

1. ***The Vedas :*** A collection of hymns, prayers, charms, litanies and sacrificial formulae. There are four *Vedas*, namely:
   (i) *RigVeda* – a collection of hymns
   (ii) *Samveda* – a collection of songs mostly taken from *RigVeda*
   (iii) *Yajurveda* – a collection of sacrificial formulae
   (iv) *Atharvaveda* – a collection of spells and charms

The *Vedas* formed the earliest segment of Vedic literature and amongst the *Vedas*, *RigVeda* is the oldest.

2. ***The Brahmanas*** : These are prose texts which contain details about the meaning of Vedic hymns, their applications, stories of their origins, etc. In a way these contain details about rituals and philosophies.

3. ***Aranyakas and Upanishads:*** These are partly included in *the Brahmanas* or attached there to, and partly exist as separate works. They embody philosophical meditations of the hermits and ascetics on soul, god, world etc.

The *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads* are attached to one or the other of the four *Vedas*.

Authorship of the Vedic Literature

Although the hymns are attributed to *rishis*, pious Hindus have always laid stress upon their divine origin. Thus, the *Vedas* are called *apaurusheya* (not created by man) and *nitya* (existing in all eternity) while the *rishis* are known as inspired seers who received the *mantras* from the Supreme deity.

Age of *RigVeda*

The date of *RigVeda* and Vedic literature has formed the subject of keen and protracted controversy. Max Muller, who first dealt with the question, began with the age of Buddha and arbitrarily assigned 200 years to the development of each of the three stages of Vedic literature and thus came to the conclusion that *RigVeda* must have been composed around 1200-1000 B.C. When questioned and criticised by his contemporaries like W.D. Whitney for his totally arbitrary, unscientific and unacademic method, Max Muller confessed that he was merely speculating and stated: "whether the Vedic hymns were composed 1000,1500 or 2000 or 3000 B.C., no power on earth will ever

determine". It may, in passing be stated that Max Muller as a true Christian believed in the genesis stories of the *Bible* and that the world was created in 4004 B.C. We have seen in Chapter 5 that the origin of the earth goes back to about 4600 million years and the origin of humans themselves goes back to about 4.2 million years.

Similarly, on the analogy of the language of *Avesta*, some scholars opined that the date of *RigVeda* may be 1000 B.C. But the fact that some of the Vedic gods namely Indra, Varuna, Mitra and the two Nasatyas are mentioned in Boghaz-Koi (Asia Minor) inscription of 1400 B.C. prove that *RigVeda* must have come into existence much before that date. The Boghaz-Koi inscription records a treaty between the Hittite and the Mitanni Kings and these gods are cited as witness to this treaty, exactly the way even today oath is taken in the courts and on assumption of a public office in the name of god.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, on astronomical grounds, dated *RigVeda* to 6000 B.C. According to Harmon Jacobi Vedic civilization flourished between 4500 B.C. and 2500 B.C. and the *Samhitas* were composed in the latter half of the period. Famous Sanskritist, Winternitz felt that the *RigVeda* was probably composed in the third millennium B.C. R.K. Mookerjee opined that "on a modest computation, we should come to 2500 B.C. as the time of *RigVeda*". G.C. Pande also favours a date of 3000 B.C. or even earlier.

RigVedic Geography: From the names of rivers, mountains and regions mentioned in *RigVeda* we have a clear idea of the geographical area in which RigVedic people, who called themselves Aryans, lived. The *Nadisukta* hymn of the *RigVeda* mentions 21 rivers which include the Ganga in the east and the Kubha (Kabul) in the west. All rivers like the Yamuna, Saraswati, Sutlej, Ravi, Jhelum and Indus located between the Ganga and Kabul rivers are mentioned not arbitrarily but serially beginning from the east i.e. Ganga to the west i.e. Kubha. In the north, the *RigVeda* mentions the Himalayas and Mujavant mountains. It also mentions ocean (*samudra*) in connection with rivers Sindhu and Saraswati falling into ocean. The ocean is also mentioned in the context of foreign trade. The RigVedic geography, therefore, covers present-day western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, whole of Pakistan and south Afghanistan.

RigVedic States: The territory known to Vedic people was divided into a number of states—republics and monarchical. The battle of ten kings, gives names of ten kings who participated in a war against Sudas who was Bharata king of Tritsus family. The ten kings were of the states of Purus, Yadus, Turvasas, Anus and Druhyus along with five others viz Alinas, Pakhtas, Bhalanas, Sibis and Vishanins. The battle was fought on the bank of Parushani (Ravi) and Sudas emerged victorious. In the context of another battle of Sudas,

RigVeda mentions people and kings like Ajias, Sigrus, Yakshus etc. The Bharatas, who gave their name to the whole country as '*Bharatvarsha*', are the most important people of the *RigVeda*. They were settled in the region between the Saraswati and Yamuna. Similarly the *RigVeda* gives the location of other people like the Purus in the region of Kurukshetra; the Tritsus east of Ravi; the Alinas, the Pakhtas, the Bhalanas and the Sibis west of Indus upto Kabul river and so on.

The struggle for supremacy among different kings and republics chiefs was a part of the evolutionary process towards the formation of a larger political entity.

Polity and Administration : The political structure of RigVedic India may be traced in the following ascending order :

(i) The Family (*kula*)
(ii) The Village (*grama*)
(iii) The Clan (*vis*)
(iv) The People (*jana*)
(v) The Country (*rashtra*)

Kula (family) was the smallest unit. It included all the people living under the same roof (*griha*). An aggregate of several families made up the *grama* like today, and its headman was called *gramini*. The next larger formation was called the *vis*, under the head called *vispati*. Larger than *vis* was *jana*. Regarding *jana* we get mention of *panchajanah* and of people called Yadus, (*Yadva-janaha*) and Bharatas (*Bharata-janaha*). The king is also called the protector of the *jana* or people. Above the *jana* was *rashtra*, i.e. the country.

The hereditary monarchy was the normal form of Government but an elected king also finds mention. We also hear of chiefs, democratically elected by the assembly of people (*jana*).

The kingdoms (*rashtra*) were generally small states ruled by kings (*rajana*) but the word *samrat* does indicate that some of them must have had bigger kingdoms and enjoyed position of greater authority and dignity, markedly different from others. The king administered justice with the assistance of *purohita* and other officials. For his services the king was paid *bali* (voluntary gift or tribute). The *bali* came to the king from his own people and also from defeated people. Theft, burglary, robbery, and cattle lifting were the principal crimes which were strongly dealt with by the administration.

Among the important royal officials, were the *purohita* (chief priest and minister), *senani* (army chief) and *gramini* (head of village). We hear also of *dutas* (envoys) and *spies* (spas). There must have been many others, who are not mentioned in the literature.

Great prominence is given in the *RigVeda* to two popular assemblies called *sabha* and *samiti* which seem to have formed an essential feature of the government. We possess no definite information about the composition of the either, or the distinction between the two. Most probably the *samiti*, which mainly dealt with policy decisions and political business, included common

people while the *sabha*, less political in character, was a more select body of the Elders or Nobles.

It was through these two assemblies that the will of the people on important matters of the *rashtra* was expressed.

Society: The RigVedic society comprised four varnas, namely Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. This classification of society was based on the occupation of individuals. The teacher and priests were called Brahmanas; rulers and administrators kshatriyas; farmers, merchants and bankers vaisyas; and artisan and labourers as sudras. These vocations were followed by persons according to their ability and liking, and the occupations had not become hereditary as they become later on. Members of the same family took to different professions and belonged to different varnas is well illustrated by a hymn of the *RigVeda* (ix.112). In this hymn a person says:

> *I am a singer;*
> *my father is a physician,*
> *my mother is a grinder of corn;*
> *having various occupations,*
> *desiring riches we remain (in the world) like cattle (in the stalls).*

It is, therefore, clear that there was freedom and mobility for the adoption of a profession and the idea of hereditary trades and occupations was not envisaged in the society.

The unit of society was family, primarily monogamous and patriachical. Child marriage was not in vogue. There are a few references to the freedom of choice in marriage. A widow could marry the younger brother of her deceased husband. The wife was husband's partner in all religious and social ceremonies. The father's property was inherited by son. The daughter could inherit it only if she was the only child of her parents. Right to property was known in moveable things like cattle, horse, gold and ornament and so also in immoveable property like land and house.

Education: The home of the teacher was the school where he taught the particular sacred texts. The texts were in the first instance learnt by pupils repeating the words taught by their teacher. A great importance was attached to enunciation and pronunciation. Intense training was given to students in oral tradition. It was this training and learning which saved a huge mass of Vedic literature.

Food and Drinks: Milk and its products – curd, butter and ghee – formed an important part of the diet. There is also mention grain cooked with milk' (*kshira-pakamodanam*).Bread (*chappati*) of wheat and barley was eaten mixed with ghee. Not only were fish, birds, wild animals like boar, antelopes, and buffalo (*gaur*), etc. eaten but on ceremonial occasions the meat of animals which were sacrificed, such as sheep, goat and buffalo etc. was also eaten. The cow was already deemed *aghnya* "not to be killed". The *Vedas* prescribe a penalty of death or expulsion from the kingdom to those who kill or injure cows. Alcoholic drinks, *sura* and *soma* were also consumed,

though their consumption has been condemned because of its intoxicating effect, which sometimes gave rise to broils in the *Sabha*.

Economic Life: The economic life of the RigVedic people centered around agriculture, cattle rearing and trade and commerce. Oxen were used for ploughing and drawing carts and horses for drawing the chariots. Other domestic animals were cows, sheep, goats, asses, dogs, buffalos etc.

The *RigVeda* attached great importance to agriculture. The plough was drawn by the oxen at times in teams of six, eight or even twelve. The grains were harvested with sickles. The manure was also used. From various references in the *RigVeda* it appears that irrigation was also practised; excess of rains and drought is mentioned as damaging the crops. The grains are collectively called *Yava* and *dhanya*. The later Vedic texts mention ten cultivated kinds of grains.

Among the other occupations, pottery-making, weaving, carpentry, metal working, leather-working etc. are most noteworthy. During the RigVedic period only copper was used for which the general term - '*ayas*' has been used. In a later period when iron came into use, copper and iron came to be known as *lohit ayas* and *syam ayas* respectively.

The trade and traders (*vanik*) were known in the RigVedic era. Barter was in vogue. It has been found that ten cows were quoted as the price for an image of Indra. The conception of money can be traced in the mention of a gift of 100 *nishkas*. Money-lending was also known. There is a mention of an eighth or a sixteenth part of one being paid either as an interest or part of the principle. The sea is mentioned in the context of trade and ocean wealth, like pearls and shells.

Religion and Philosophy: During the RigVedic time the gods worshipped are generally the personified powers of nature. The Vedic gods can be classified into three categories, namely terrestrial (*prithivisthana*), aerial or intermediate (*antarikshasthana*), and celestial (*dyusthana*). Prithivi, Agni, Soma, Brihaspati and rivers belong to the first category; Indra, Apam-napat, Rudra, Vayu-Vata, Parjanya, and Apah (water) to the second and Dyaus, Varuna, Mitra, Surya, Savitri, Pushan, Vishnu, the Adityas, Ushas and the Asvins to the third. Indra and Varuna (the supreme cosmic and moral ruler) stand out, in that order, pre-eminent above the rest. Agni and Soma were also popular deities. Agni was revered as the messenger between the earth and the heaven. Further, Agni is the only God who is regarded as present among all the categories of Gods.

The Gods are described as born, yet they are immortal. In appearance they are humans, though sometimes they are conceived as animals, e.g. Dyaus as bull and Sun as a swift horse. The food of men such as milk, grain, flesh, etc. becomes the food of Gods when offered in the sacrifice. On the whole, the gods are benevolent, some of them also had malevolent traits, like Rudra and Maruta. Splendour, strength,

knowledge, possession and truth are common attributes of the deities.

Prayers and offering to these Gods were made for material gains, also for enlightenment and knowledge. For example, the most popular and famous *Gayatri Mantra* is recited daily by the pious Hindus even today.

Besides the ritualistic aspect of religion, there is profound philosophy. The multiplicity of gods is openly questioned and the ultimate unity of universe is asserted as the creation of one God to whom different designations applied. The creation is deemed as the outcome of the sacrifice made by the *Viratpurusha* or of evolution from non-being manifested in the form of water. It is said that *Hiranyagarbha* arose from the great waters, pervading the universe, and thus created the waves out of eternally pre-existing matter. This hymn devoted to Visvakarman tells us that the waters contained the primordial germ — the floating world-egg from which arises Visvakarman , the first born in the universe — the creator and maker of the world. It is now confirmed by science that life first developed in water. One of the RigVedic hymns pointedly says, " There is one reality (*ekam sat*) whom the sages speak of in many ways, calling it Agni, Yama or Matarisvan".

The Question of the Aryan Invasion

The Florentine merchant Filippo Sassetti, who lived in Goa for five years from A.D. 1583 to 1588, was struck by similarities between Sanskrit and European languages, especially Latin and Greek. Later it was further elaborated by Sir William Jones and many other scholars who were in the service of East India Company. To account for similarities between European and Indian languages, some scholars postulated that the ancestors of Indians and Europeans must at one time have lived in the same region and spoken the same language. They called this Indo-European language, and their common homeland as the Indo-European homeland. Scholars do not agree about many of these linguistic propositions. However, the problem with the original homeland of the Aryans is still a matter of debate and there is a great divergence of opinion. Various scholars have propounded different homelands like Steppe of central Asia, southern Russia, southern Europe, Germany, Chinese Turkistan or even Mediterranean area like Palestine and Israel, almost where except India where the Vedic language and its literature found the full expression and endured the longest. Scholars do not agree also regarding the time of their migration to various areas like India, Eurasia, western Asia and Europe. Some think that the Aryans spread along with the spread of Neolithic (agriculture about 9000 years ago) while others link it with the spread of Bronze Age.

The oldest surviving records of the Aryans is the *RigVeda*. The *RigVeda* does not give even an inkling of any migration of Aryans from any other area. It does not even have a faint memory of any such migration. It does

not have any knowledge even of the geography beyond the known boundaries of Ancient India. Some scholars think that Aryans came to India around 1500 B.C. Max Muller thought that even 1200 or 1000 B.C. date could be assigned to this event. This was because Max Muller as a true Christian believed in *Bible* according to which the world was created on 23rd October 4004 B.C. and thus the entire human history has to be fitted within the 6000 years.

Many scholars think that the Aryans were originally inhabitants of India and did not come from outside. It has been argued by such scholars that there is no archaeological or biological evidence which could establish the arrival of any new people from outside between 5000 B.C. and 800 B.C. This would mean that if at all there was any migration of Aryans or for that matter of any, other people, in India, it may have taken place at least eight or nine thousand years ago or after 800 B.C. to both of which there is no evidence. Further, the skeletal remains found from various Harappan sites resemble the skeltons of the modern population of the same geographical area.

Harappan Civilization and the *RigVeda*

Since the discovery of the Harappan civilization many scholars have tried to identify this with the long literary and cultural tradition of India on the one hand and the Aryans on the other. In the very first decade of its discovery some historians and archaeologists thought Harappan civilization represents the Vedic civilization, but the paucity of evidence became the main argument of the opponents of the theory. The researches carried out over a period of last 50 years have added a new evidences and have altered the picture considerably.

A critical consideration of the evidence of the *RigVeda* will lead to the conclusion that references it contains about people and their civilization may be taken to refer to the Harappan civilization. The reference to RigVedic deities in Boghaz-Koi inscription of fourteenth century B.C. would indicate that the *RigVeda* existed earlier and the culture migrated from India to Asia Minor in that early age. As has been explained in the chapter earlier, the age of the *RigVeda* in its final form should be placed not later than about 3,000 B.C. In the following pages we shall look at the similarities and differences between the RigVedic and Harappan civilizations.

The geographical distribution of the Harappan sites can be seen in the light of RigVedic geography also. As we have seen in the previous section, the RigVedic geography extended from Afghanistan in the north to Gujarat in the south, Ganga in the east to Kubha (Kabul) Pakistan in the west. Among all the rivers in the *RigVeda* the Saraswati is considered to be the most important and sacred and the areas around the Saraswati and its tributaries were the core culture areas. As we have seen earlier, the main area of Harappan civilization is the

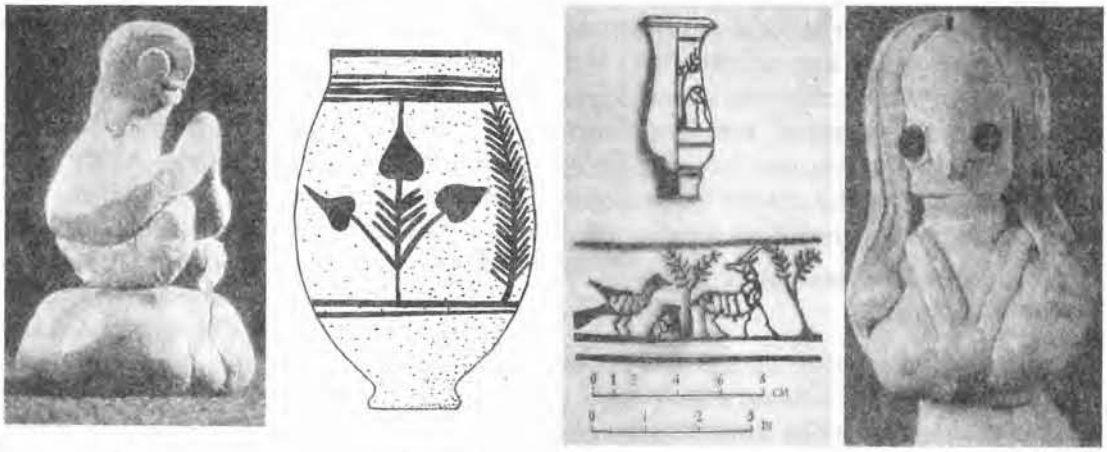
Saraswati valley where more than 80% of the Harappan settlements are located. Thus the RigVedic and the Harappan geography are the same.

The *RigVeda* refers to hundreds of cities, towns and forts, which are broad (*prithvi*) and wide (*urvi*), full of kine (*gomati*), of 100 pillars (*satabhuji*) built of stone (*asmamayi*), and to autumnal (*saradi*) forts as refuge against inundations. Indra is known as Purandara "Lord of cities". The *RigVeda* also mentions of business and mercantile people to whom it calls *vanik* and *panis* respectively and refers to the Vedic people such as Turvasa and Yadu, as hailing from the sea.

Most of the animals known to the Indus people are also known to the *RigVeda,* such as sheep, dog, buffalo, bull, etc. The animals hunted by the RigVedic people were antelopes, boars, buffalos (*gaur*), lions, and elephants most of which are also familiar to the Indus people. Horse was an important animal in the vedic period. Horse bones and terracotta figurines have been found at some Harappan sites.

Fig. 9.1 *A Terracotta Figurine of Horse from Lothal*

Some of the religious practices of the Harappan people are followed by the modern Hindus. Worship of *pipal* trees, bull, Siva-lingas is seen in the Harappan civilization. The *kamandalu,*



(a) *(b)* *(c)* *(d)*

Fig. 9.2 *(a) A Terracotta Figurine in Namaskar Mudra (b) Pipal Tree (c) Painting Depicting the Story of "Thirsty Crow" (d) A Terracotta Figurine with Vermillion in the Hair Parting*

which is seen in the modern days as one of the most auspicious possessions of asetics, is also found in the Harappan civilization. A large number of figurines in various yogic postures have also been found. Some terracotta figurines of women found at Nausharo still have vermillion in their hair-parting. This is the most precious and sacred symbol of married Hindu women. A terracotta tablet from Harappa depicts the scene of *Mahisa* sacrifice, reminding us of *Mahisasuramardini.*

These are earrings, necklaces, bracelets, anklets, garlands and jewels for the neck. We have seen that most of these ornaments were also in use by the Harappan people.

Besides gold, the *RigVeda* mentions another metal called *ayas,* of which vessels were made. In *RigVeda, ayas* is used as a general term for metal. but in *Atharvaveda* we find the mention of *lohit ayas* and *syam ayas* meaning copper and iron respectively. Scholars agree that in RigVedic times only copper was known and so the term *ayas*

Fig. 9.3 *A row of Seven Fire Altars (havana-kundas) found at Kalibangan*

The stories of the "cunning fox" and "thirsty crow" are found painted on Harappan vases. The *swastika,* the sacred symbol of the Hindus, is found on seals as well as in paintings. The fire-altars serving as *havana-kundas* are also very much a part of the Harappan civilization.

As regards metals, the *RigVeda* knows ornaments of gold (*hiranya*). denotes copper. The *RigVeda* also mentions implements of stone, such as stone pulley i.e., sling-stones.

The treatment of hair by the men and women as mentioned in the *RigVeda* also bears some resemblance to Harappan practice. The hair was combed and oiled. There is a mention of a maiden wearing her hair in four plaits. Men also sometimes styled their

hair in coils, and grew beards, which is all visible in the terracotta figurines of the Harappan civilization.

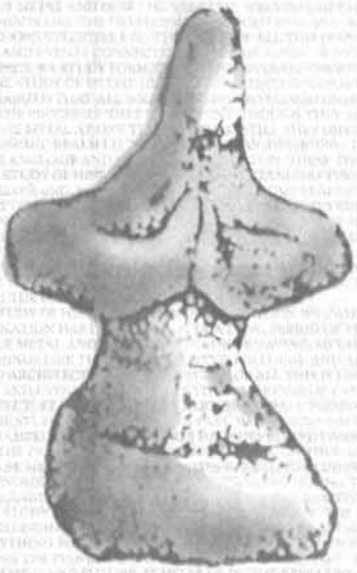
The *RigVeda* refers to the weaver and to his loom, the shuttle, the warp and the woof for weaving a cloth. Remains of cloth have been found in certain Harappan sites and some figures are shown as wearing a cloth.

The above similarities, and many others found between the RigVedic and Harappan civilization have led a number of scholars to conclude that the Harappan civilization is the same as the Vedic civilization and the Aryans did not come to India from outside. However, there are other scholars who consider Vedic culture as different from that of the Harappan civilization.

The whole question of the Aryan invasion theory has most aptly been summed up by the famous anthropologist, Professor Edmund Leach of Cambridge University. In 1990 in his famous article 'Aryan Invasions over Four Millennia' published in the book, *Culture Through Time: Anthropological Approaches* he wrote, "Why do serious scholars persist in believing in the Aryan invasion? (...) Why is this sort of thing attractive? Who finds it attractive? Why has the development of early Sanskrit come to be so dogmatically associated with an Aryan invasion? (...) The details of this theory fit in with this racist framework (...) The origin myth of British Colonial imperialism helped the elite administrators in the Indian Civil Service to see themselves as bringing 'pure' civilization to a country in which civilization of the most sophisticated kind was already nearly 6000 years old. Here, I will only remark that the hold if this myth on the British middle class imagination is so strong that even today, 44 years after the death of Hitler and 43 years after the creation of an independent India and independent Pakistan, the Aryan invasions of the second millennium BC are still treated as if they were an established fact of history (...) The Aryan invasions never happenend at all".

Exercises

1. Explain the following :
   Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, Gramini, Bali, Sabha, Samiti, Hiranyagarbha, Kula, Rashtra.
2. Describe the Vedic literature.
3. Describe the RigVedic geography with reference to rivers and mountains.
4. Describe the RigVedic states and their political structure.
5. Discuss the society and economy of the RigVedic people.
6. Discuss the religion and philosophy of the RigVedic period.
7. Discuss the evidence pointing towards similarities between the Harappan and RigVedic cultures.
8. Discuss the question of Aryan migration and the age *of RigVeda.*



CHAPTER 10

THE LATER VEDIC AGE

THE four *Vedas* were follow[ed] [by] the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas* and the *Upar*[ishads]

WE have seen earlier how different branches of Vedic literature had grown out of one another. The four *Vedas* were followed by the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads*. The *Brahmanas*, the earliest of the Aryan's prose literature, explain in detail various Vedic sacrificial ceremonies and their origins. *Aranyakas* are the concluding portions of the *Brahmanas* and are called so because the philosophical and mystical character of their contents required that they should be studied in the solitude of the *aranya* or forest. The *Aranyakas* form a tradition that culminates in the *Upanishads*, the last phase of the Vedic literature. The *RigVeda* broadly deals with ritualistic (*Karmakanda*) and philosophical aspects. The ritualistic aspect is elaborated in the *Brahmanas* and the philosophic aspect is elaborated in the *Upanishads*. *Upanishads* do not believe in the sacrificial acquiring ceremonies but in knowledge by which deliverance is obtained from mundane existence through the absorption of the individual soul (*Atman*) in the world-soul. (*Brahma*). The two oldest and most important of the *Upanishads* are the *Chhandogya* and *Brihadaranyaka*. Other important *Upanishads* include *Kathak*, *Isa*, *Mundaka*, *Prasna*, etc.

Geography and the New Political States : We have already seen that the main settlement of the RigVedic people was the region of Indus and Saraswati valleys. During the period represented by the later *Samhitas* and *Brahmanas* the settlements covered virtually the whole of northern India. The centre of civilization now shifted from Saraswati to Ganga which now occupies the proud place of the most revered and sacred river of India. This progress was accompanied by another remarkable development and that is gradual expansion and consolidation of *vis*. The earlier known *jana* like Bharatas, Purus, Tritsus, and Turvasas of the RigVedic period slowly were merging with other *janas* and disappearing from the scene. In a way gradual consolidation and expansion of some of the states started taking place. Relatively minor *janas* of RigVedic times like Purus became more powerful and began to play more dominant role. We no longer hear of the Anus, Druhyus, Turvasas, the Krivis, etc. Besides these, in the eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar areas also such states as Kasi, Kosala, Videha, Magadha and Anga developed. However, the areas of south India are not clearly mentioned. The political life became more vivid and the struggle for supremacy among different states was of frequent occurrence. The ideal of universal empire loomed large.

The expansion of people towards the east is indicated in a legend of *Satapatha Brahmana* – how Videgh Madhav migrated from Saraswati region, the land of Vedic Culture, crossed Sadanira (modern Gandak river), the eastern boundary of Kosala and came to the land of Videha (modern Tirhut). The texts testify the growth of three kingdoms, namely, Kosala, Kasi and Videha. It may be noted that till 1950 no archaeological evidence could take the antiquity of

cultures in the Ganga valley prior to the sixth century B.C. Thereafter, the excavations at Hastinapur, Atranjikhera, and many other sites have revealed cultures ranging from 2000 B.C. onwards. The recent excavations at Raja-Nal-ka-Tila in Sonbhadra district and other sites have taken back the date for use of iron in adjoining Varanasi district, ancient Kasi, to *c.* 1500 B.C. Some characteristic pottery of post Harappan period are Ochre Coloured Pottery (O.C.P.) (*c.* 2000-1500) Black and Red ware, Painted Grey Ware (*c.* 1200-600 B.C.) etc. By about seventh century B.C., Northern Black Polished (N.B.P.) ware came to be manufactured.

Kuru-Panchala appears to be the same geographical region as modern western and central Uttar Pradesh. In the *Upanishads* the Kuru-Panchala region is mentioned as the seat of culture and prosperity. The Panchala king Pravahana Jaivali is mentioned as daily attending the *Panchala parishad*. The texts testify the three kingdoms of Kosala, Kasi and Videha as seats of Vedic culture. Magadha and Anga are also mentioned as distant lands in the *Atharvaveda*. The RigVedic Kikatas have been identified with Magadha. Matsya janapada also gets mentioned. In south, Vidarbha (Maharashtra) is mentioned. Madra was located in the Punjab region, further west is associated with Bahlikas, Kesins, Kekayas and Kamboja.

Polity and Administration : Side by side with the growth of larger states, we find that detailed political and administrative structure was also emerging. Kingship was consolidating itself as the normal form of government with the states growing both in number and size. The kingship was being given the status of divine origin. There was also emerging the concept of a king of kings. Expressions like *adhiraj, rajadhiraja, samrat* and *ekrat* are used in most of the texts. The *Atharvaveda* defines *ekrat* to be the paramount sovereign. There also developed special ceremonies for the anointment of kings, such as the *Vajpeya, Rajsuya* and *Ashvamedha*.

Though the monarchy established itself on firm foundations, it was not absolute but limited in several ways. Within the framework of kingship, there were operating certain democratic elements. These were: (i) The people's right in choosing their king ; (ii) the conditions imposed on king's rights and duties; (iii) the kings dependence on the council of his ministers; and the assemblies of people, *sabha* and *samiti*, as check upon king's absolutism.

Under no circumstances was the king considered the sole owner of the kingdom with absolute power over the objects and subjects. The king was supposed to be only a trustee and the kingdom as a trust. The condition of his holding it was, "the promotion of the people's well being and progress". Besides, the ministers and officials, *sabha* and *samiti* played important role in the administration. The *sabha* functioned as a parliament for disposal of public business by debate and discussion. The Chief of the *sabha* was called *sabhapati*, the keepers as *sabhapala* and the members as *sabheya, sabhasad* or *sabhasina*.

There were rules which governed the debate in *sabha* and *Vajsaneyi Samhita* mentions that erring members were 'rebuked'. *Sabha* also seems to have functioned as a court of justice. It is said that, "one who attends the *sabha* sits as a law court to dispense *dharma* (justice)".

The *samiti* was different than *sabha* in the function and composition. The *sabha* was a smaller select body and also functioned as the lower court, while the *samiti* was the larger General Assembly of the people. Accordingly, the latter is referred to as expressing the voice of *vis* (people), which is explained by the fact that in one instance it is the *samiti* which chooses the king and in another it withdraws that choice for the king's misdeeds and tyranny.

However, the increase in complexity in the society and political structure is duly reflected in the enlarged entourage of the state. We hear of new officials such as *suta* (charioteer), *sangrahitri* (treasurer), *bhagadugha* (collector of taxes), *gramini* (head of village), *sthapati* (chief judge), *takshan* (carpenter), *kshatri* (chamberlain) and several others whose exact function cannot be ascertained. Everything indicates that the administrative machinery was highly organised and became an efficient instrument for ruling over a large kingdom.

The liberal spirit of the age is reflected in the following advice which, according to the *Yajurveda*, was tendered by the priest to the king at the coronation ceremony: "As a ruler, from this day onwards, judge the strong and weak impartially and fairly. Strive unceasingly to do good to the people and above all protect the country from all calamities".

We find that legal institutions were also coming into sharper focus. The king administered justice and wielded the rod of punishment. Among the crimes enumerated are theft, robbery, adultery, incest, abduction, killing of man. Killing of cow, slaying of brahmana, drinking intoxicating liquor, treachery, etc. were punishable by death. Petty offences were left to "village judges". For evidence, the eye-witness was more important than informer. The punishments for crime were rather severe. The law was also very clear on the question of inheritance of property, ownership of land, etc. The father's property was to be inherited by sons alone. The daughters could inherit it only if she was the only child or there were no male issues.

Social System : The gradual political evolution was by no means the most important factor in the history of later Vedic period. Changes of far greater significance were gradually taking place in the society and religion. In the RigVedic period society comprised four varnas depending on one's profession and within a family, members could follow the professions of different varnas. In later Vedic period, varnas came to be birth-based rather than profession-based. The proliference of professions gave rise to *jatis*. But the *jati* system was not yet as rigid as it became during the period of the *sutras*. It was somewhere in the middle of flexible RigVedic society and rigid

society of the Sutra period. Emergence of *jati* was very unusual but perhaps not impossible in that age. The *RigVeda* describes Vishvamitra as a *rishi* but *Aitareya Brahmana* mentions him as kshatriya. In the same *Brahmana* we find that rigidity in terms of *jati* is coming up. The position of fourth varna, i.e. sudra was made miserable by depriving them of the rights of performing sacrifices, learning the sacred texts and of even holding landed property. The most glaring evil of the *jati* system, namely, the concept of untouchability had not yet reared its ugly head. There are instances of individuals such as Kavasha, Vatsa and Satyakama Jabala who were born in non-brahman *jatis* but came to be known as great brahmans. On the whole, *jati* had not yet become a rigid system, and none of the three factors which characterised it later *viz.* prohibition of inter-dining, inter-marriage and determination of varna by descent, were yet established on a rigid basis.

Economic life: The growth of economic prosperity is indicated in many prayers contained in the *Atharvaveda* for the success of farmers, shepherds, merchants and so on. There are prayers for ploughing, sowing, rains, increase in cattle, wealth and exorcism against beasts, wild animals and robbers and the likes. The plough was known as *sira* and the furrow *sita*. Cow dung was used as manure. There is mention of six, eight and even twenty-four oxen yoked to a plough. Many kinds of grains were grown such as rice, barley, beans and sesame. Their seasons are also mentioned: barley sown in winter, ripened in summer; rice sown in the rains, reaped in autumn. The *Satapatha Brahmana* enumerates various operations of agriculture such as ploughing, sowing, reaping and threshing.

Agriculture suffered from the usual pests – the moles that destroyed the seed and other creatures that harmed the tender shoots. The *Atharvaveda* mentions that drought and excess rains threatened agriculture. Cattle wealth was considered to be of great significance and a fairly long hymn in the *Atharvaveda* shows reverence to cow and the death penalty prescribed for cow-killing.

Rich merchants have been often referred to. Moneylending was in vogue. Specific weight and measure-units were also known. *Niska* and *satamana* were the units of currency. There is no evidence of the use of coins with specific weight, size and device during the time under discussion. Haggling in the market was known from RigVedic times itself. Sea-borne trade was well known and *Aitareya Brahmana* speaks of the "inexhaustible sea" and "the sea as encircling the earth".

Bali, which was earlier only a voluntary gift to chief, had now become a regular tax and was collected to maintain the political and administrative structure.

There has been a striking development in industry and occupations. During this period, we hear of

fishermen, fire and rangers, washermen, barbers, butchers, elephant-keepers, footmen, messengers, makers of jewels, baskets, ropes, dyes, chariots, bows, smelters, smiths, potters etc. Merchants, long distance caravans and sea trade are mentioned. Guilds of craftsmen also came into existence. The word *sreshthi,* head of guild, finds mention in several texts.

During the period of *RigVeda* we find the mention of only *ayas* which has been taken as copper/bronze. With the introduction of a new metal i.e., iron in this age we get the terms *syam ayas* (iron) and *lohit ayas* (copper). Besides these, gold, lead and tin are also referred to. While the iron was used for making weapons and other objects like nail-parers, hammers, clamps, ploughshares etc. The copper was used for making vessels. Silver (*rajat*) and Gold were used for making ornaments, dishes etc.

Education : This period witnessed the growth of a vast and varied literature. The *Upanishads*, being the highest level of intellectual attainments, which was no doubt the outcome of intellectual pursuits of the time. Education began with the *Upanayana* ceremony which was considered as second birth of the child and that is why after this ceremony he came to be known as *dvija.* The aim of learning was faith, retention of knowledge acquired, progeny, wealth, longevity and immortality. They, thus, comprehended success in both worldly as well as spiritual life. The duties of pupils were well defined.

During this period under discussion there were three stages of studies. In the first stage, pupils studied at the homes of their teachers where they lived as family members and participated in the household works also. Beside these, there were small schools of learning run by an individual teacher who would choose his own pupils. There were other means of education. The educated men even as a householder carried on their quest of knowledge by mutual discussions and regularly visiting the distinguished sages and learned scholars at different centres or while they were moving from one place to another. There were also *parishads* in different janapadas patronised by kings. Besides these residential schools, academies for advanced study and circles of philosophical discussions, a great impetus to learning came from the assemblies of learned men, gathered together by kings. A typical example of these was the conference of the learned organised by king Janak of Videha, which is mentioned in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.* The participants in this conference were Yajnavalkya, Uddalaka Aruni, Sakalya, Gargi and a number of other scholars. The details of this conference and various topics discussed there are given in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.* Learning was sought from those who were knowledgeable. We learn that Yajnavalkya, after completing his education with Uddalaka Aruni, went to Janaka (a king and kshatriya) to

study philosophy and other subjects. However, in the Janaka's conference Yajnavalkya defeated all the participants in discussions and was declared as the most learned and wise.

Significantly, an active part was taken in intellectual pursuit by women. Gargi and Maitreyi are the great examples. The *RigVeda* refers to a number of women who composed hymns. An important feature of the time is the part taken by kshatriyas in the intellectual pursuit. Janaka, the king of Videha, Pravahana Jaivali, the king of Panchala, Asvapati Kaikeya the king of Kasi – all kshatriyas, were well known scholars to whom even the learned brahmans came to for further instructions.

The texts mention the subjects of study at the time. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* mentions such subjects as the study of *Vedas*, Mathematics, Mineralogy, Logic, Ethics, Military Science, Astronomy, Science dealing with poisons, Fine Arts and Crafts, Music, and Medical Sciences.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* classifies all these subjects of study under *Aparavidya*. It reserves the term *Paravidya* for the highest knowledge, the knowledge of *atman*, which involves knowledge of life, death, God etc.

Religion and Philosophy: The *Brahmanas* record the growth of ritualism and ceremonial religion and the consequent growth of priesthood. From simple sacrifices occupying just one day or a couple of days, there were now many, lasting from twelve days to a year or even more. While the *RigVeda* knows of only seven priests and two chief priests, now a large-scale ceremonies required seventeen priests. There were domestic rites and sacraments which embraced the entire life span of a man — from his birth to death, or rather beyond it, as ceremonies were also performed for the departed souls.

These rites and ceremonies were not the only means of attaining success in life in this world, or the bliss in heaven. Soon the idea of penance and meditation took the precedence. Men took to ascetic practices under the belief that they would not only gain heaven but also develop "mystic, extraordinary and superhuman faculties".

On one hand elaborate rites, ceremonies and ascetic practices were taking the place of simple religious worship of the RigVedic period, on the other, the intellectual pursuit of the people continued with the conviction that salvation was attainable only through true knowledge. Thus, was laid down the doctrine: "he who knows God, attains God, nay, he is God". As explained earlier, the distinction between rituals and knowledge was recognised by the *Vedas*. But it is only towards the later phase of the Vedic period where it was elaborated upon.

The general body of early philosophical treatises is known by the name of *Upanishad*. The number of *Upanishads* is about 200. The oldest among these are the *Brihadaranyaka* and *Chhandogya* which contain bold speculations about the eternal problems of human thought concerning God, man and the universe etc. The *Upanishads* are justly regarded

as the most important contribution of India towards the world's stock of spiritual thought. The great philosopher Schoperhaur, after reading the Latin translation of the Persian translation of *Upanishads* wrote: "From every sentence deep, original and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit. Indian air surrounds us, and original thoughts of kindred spirits". Even Max Muller held that, "the earliest of these philosophical treatises will always maintain a place in the literature of the world, among the most astounding productions of the human mind in any age and in any country".

Science and Technology

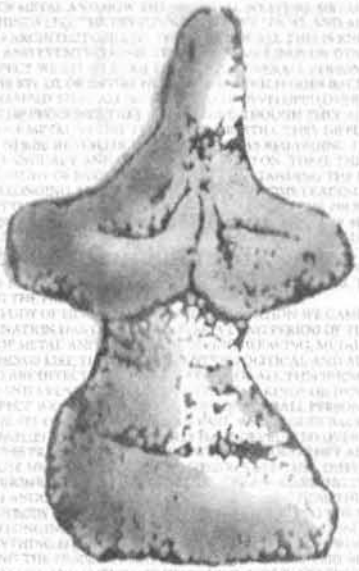
Vedas, *Brahmanas* and *Upanishads* give enough idea about sciences during this period. Mathematics has been called by the general name ganita which includes Arithmetic (*anka ganita*), Geometry (*rekha ganita*), Algebra (*bija ganita*), Astronomy and Astrology (*jyotisa*).

Vedic people knew the methods of making squares equal in area to triangles, circles and calculate the sums and differences of squares. The Zero was known in RigVedic times itself and due to this, large numbers could also be recorded. Also the positional value of each number with its absolute value was known. Cubes, cuberoots, squareroots and underroots were also known and used.

In the Vedic period, astronomy was well developed. They knew the movement of heavenly bodies and calculated about their positions at different times. It helped them in preparing accurate calendars and predicting the time of solar and lunar eclipses. They also knew that the earth moved on its own axis and around the sun. The Moon moved around the earth. They also tried to calculate the time period taken for revolution and distances among heavenly bodies from the sun. The results of these calculations are almost the same as the ones done by modern methods.

Exercises

1. Explain the following:
   Varna, *Jati, Niska, Satamana, Ekrat, Samrat, Bhagadugha, Ashvamedha, Vajpeya, Upanayana.*
2. Describe the sources for the history of the Later Vedic Age.
3. Discuss the Later Vedic geography with reference to its political states.
4. Describe the social system during the Later Vedic period. How was it different from the RigVedic period?
5. Describe the following during Later Vedic period.
   (i) The development in the field of economy.
   (ii) The political and administrative system.
   (iii) The religion and philosophy.
   (iv) The learning and education.



CHAPTER 11

FRUITION OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

INDIAN philosophy, with a distinctive character of its own, originated in the speculations of Vedic sages and reached its fruition in the *Advaita Vedanta* of Sankara.

INDIAN philosophy, with a distinctive character of its own, originated in the speculations of Vedic sages and reached its fruition in the *Advaita Vedanta* of Sankara.

In the Vedic age, the forces of Nature were personified as gods, as living on the earth, in the sky and in the heaven. Men offered oblations to the gods and asked for cattle, crops, wealth, prosperity, health, longevity, progeny, victory, peace and happiness here, and heaven after death. Some Vedic seers however believed that there was an Ultimate Being which manifested Itself as the various gods.

The famous *Nasadiya* hymn of *RigVeda* speculates: "He from whom this creation arose, whether He made it or did not make it, the highest seer in the highest heaven, he forsooth knows, or does even he not know?"

There were speculations about the nature of the Ultimate Reality, the process of Creation, the nature of the Self and its relation with the Ultimate Reality, the highest Value of life and the Right Way of living. All this resulted in a large number of books called *Upanishads*. Though, the number of *Upanishads* is large, but only eleven are considered to be of great importance. They are: *Isa, Kathak, Kena Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chhandogya, Brhadaranyaka and Svetasvatara*. There seems to be a general agreement among all on the following:

(i) The Ultimate, Enduring, and Unitary Reality in the individual is *Atman* (self).

(ii) The Ultimate Reality in and beyond the objective world is called *Brahma*. It is from *Brahma* that the entire world originates: it is in *Brahma* that it exists; and it is *in Brahma* that it merges. *Brahma* is real, infinite and blissful Consciousness.

(iii) The pure *Atman* and Brahma are one. An individual would be right in saying "I am *Brahma*".

(iv) The one appears as many, on account of Its wonderful power *Maya*.

(v) All unhappiness and sufferings of man are due to ignorance of the fact that man is the *Atman* which is the same as the *Brahma*. The union of *Atman* with *Brahma* is called *Moksha*, which liberates one from the chain of birth and death and is therefore the achievement of highest goal.

(vi) To realise the *Atman* one has to give up all desires for worldly and finite objects, purify one's intellect, and live a righteous life.

These doctrines have been echoed and re-echoed throughout Indian history. Ramkrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ramatirtha, Aurobindo, and other great thinkers of modern age have also dwelt upon Upanishadic philosophy.

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, also contain ethical and philosophical precepts. The *Ramayana* makes Rama the embodiment of the highest ethical ideals.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* embodies the teachings of Lord Krishna. It is highly valued all over India and the world, and has been translated into a number of languages. It says one should remain balanced both in happiness and sorrow, in profit and loss and in victory and defeat. It tells that *Atman* is indestructible, neither weapons can pierce it nor fire can burn it. Death is always that of body and not of *Atman* which takes another body as its abode. The god incarnates himself with a view to punish the wicked and protect the good people.

One can attain *moksha* in three ways – by acquiring highest knowledge (*Janan*), by devotion to God (*bhakti*) and by action, i.e. selfless performance of one's duties (*karma*) without caring for reward.

According to the doctrine of *karma* one's present birth and condition is determined by the *karma* of his previous birth. Belief in *karma* does not necessarily involve fatalism. Most thinkers have said that though our present condition is due to *karma* in previous birth, but by our foresightedness and righteous deeds in the present life we can change these conditions.

The continuous quest by the sages gave birth to great philosophical systems, which looked upon man and the universe with an unbiased, free and rational mindset. The important systems are *Charvaka*, Jaina, Buddha, *Vaisesika, Nyaya, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*. The first three systems are *nastika* i.e. do not believe in the authority of the *Vedas* and the God, while all others are *astika,* i.e. believe in the *Vedas* and the God.

The *Charvaka* system (also called *Lokayata*) believes only in materialism. The physical body composed of material elements is the only essence of man. Death only is the end of man ; and enjoyment of pleasures are the only objects in life. There is no life beyond death, no heaven or hell, no 'Law of *karma*', and no rebirth. The *Charvaka* system does not believe in soul, god, or any other life beyond the present one.

About the other two in this category i.e. Jainism and Buddhism you will learn in detail in the next chapter.

Among the remaining six systems of philosophy there is some similarity and affinity between *Nyaya* and *Vaisesika*, *Samkhya* and *Yoga*, and *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*. The *Mimamsa* recognises the *Vedas* as the final authority in determining the duties of man, and the Vedantists in gaining true knowledge about Man and the Universe. One is concerned with the *Karmakanda* and the other with the *Jnanakanda* of the *Vedas*, that is, the *Samhitas* and the *Brahmanas*, and the *Upanishads* respectively.

Vaisesika

The *Vaisesika* system is a realistic, analytic, and objective philosophy of the world. It tries to distinguish between the various kinds of ultimate things and to classify all the objects under five elements — Earth Water, Air, Fire, and Ether — existing in the form of Atom, Time, Space, Minds and Self. The

creation of the world begins when the atoms of these five elements start to combine, and when they disintegrate, the world comes to an end. *Vaisesika*, thus postulates a dualism of the matter and soul, and declares that salvation depends on fully recognising the atomic nature of the universe, and its difference with the soul.

Nyaya

The *Nyaya* system accepts all the categories recognised by the *Vaisesika* system and adds one *Abhava* (negation). It also accepts all the substances admitted by the *Vaisesika* system, and considers God to be the creator of the world. He is a soul (*atman*) free from the 'Law of *karma*' and rebirth. The 'Law of *karma*' operates independently of Him. In the state of *pralaya* (cosmic dissolution) and *Apavarga* (*moksha*) or freedom from the life of *samsara* (birth and death) there is no consciousness in the soul. *Nyaya* makes a detailed study of the sources of knowledge (*pramana*). According to *Nyaya* school there are four *pramanas*, namely perception (*pratyaksha*), inference (*anumana*), comparison (*upamana*) and verbal testimony i.e. "words" (*sabda*).

Samkhya

The *Samkhya* is the oldest of all six systems of philosophy. It teaches the existence of twenty-five basic principles (*tattva*). Of these twenty-five *tattvas*, first is *Prakriti* i.e. "matter". The *Samkhya* system believes that the evolution of universe is not due to God but due to the inherent nature of the *Prakriti*. It is from *Prakriti* that all things like air, water, ether (*akasa*), intelligence (*buddhi*), self conciousness, sight, touch, hearing, speech, etc. develop. One of the most important *tattva* in all this is *Purusa*, the "soul". As in Jainism the *Samkhya* believes that there are infinite number of souls and *Purusa* is not dependent on *Prakriti* nor *Prakriti* is dependent on *Purusa*. Yet *Purusa* is involved in some way in the *Prakriti* i.e. the matter and salvation lies in recognising their differences.

A very important feature of *Samkhya* is the doctrine of three qualities (*guna*). These are virtue (*Sattva*), passion (*Rajas*) and dullness (*Tamas*). It is said that in the beginning these three *gunas* are present in all beings in equilibrium, but as they evolve, one or other of these three *gunas* come to dominate. The *Sattvaguna* represents the truth, wisdom, beauty and goodness; the *Rajas* signifies fierceness, activeness, violence, energy and; while the *Tamas* is darkness, foolishness, gloomy, unhappy etc.

However, the distinction between the *Purusa* (soul) and *Prakriti* (matter) was modified in Tantricism which developed in later days. In Tantricism *Purusa* came to signify "man" and *Prakriti* "woman".

Yoga

Yoga is probably the best known Hindu philosophical system in the world. In this system the self-control and self-mortification is supreme. Anyone who has mastered the various aspect of this

doctrine is known as *yogi*. According to *yoga* the god is not the creator but an exalted soul which has existed all through without ever having merged with the matter. The salvation in this system is by practicing the following eight things:

(i) *Yama* (self-control): *yama* means the practice of five moral rules which are truth, non-violence, chastity, not stealing and no greed.

(ii) *Niyama* (observance): complete and regular observance of five more moral rules which are purity, contentment, austerity, study of *Vedas* and devotion to God.

(iii) *Asanas* (postures): sitting in certain prescribed postures which are an essential part of *yoga*. These are known as *yogasanas*. The most famous is *Padmasana* in which gods and sages are commonly depicted.

(iv) *Pranayama* (control of breath): the control of breath at will is another step in this doctrine. This is considered to be of great physical and spiritual value.

(v) *Pratyahara* (restrain): in which the sense organs are trained in such a way that they do not take notice of their own perceptions and feelings.

(vi) *Dharana* (steadying the mind): concentrating on a single object such as tip of the nose or a sacred symbol.

(vii) *Dhyana* (meditation): by concentration the mind can be filled only by that object on which concentration is being made and completely emptied of all other things.

(viii) *Samadhi* (deep meditation): in which it is only the soul which remains and the whole personality is temporarily disolved.

A person who has mastered *yoga* can live a very long life, hold his breath for a long period without suffering injury, can control the rhythm of his own heartbeat and can withstand extremes of heat and cold.

In *yoga*, it is through *Samadhi* the soul gets released from the life cycle and joins the exalted soul i.e. the God.

Mimamsa

The *Mimamsa* system is a philosophy of interpretation, application and use of the texts of the *Samhita* and *Brahmana* portions of *Vedas*. The *Mimamsa* system recognises the *Vedas* as the final authority in determining the duties of man, and the *Vedantists* in gaining the true knowledge about man and universe. It recognises two paths of salvation. One is concerned with the *karmakanda* (ritualism) and other with the *jnanakanda* (pursuit of knowledge) of the *Vedas* i.e. the *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, and the *Upanishads* respectively.

Vedanta

The ancient Indian thoughts on philosophy reached its peak in the philosophy of *Vedanta*. Sankara's commentaries on *Upanishads*, *Brahmasutra* and *Bhagvada-Gita* are important for understanding the *Vedanta* Philosophy. Sankara held that all works teach the Ultimate Reality i.e. *Brahma* is One. The *Vedanta*

philosophy expanded by Sankara is known as *Advaita Vedanta*. The *Brahma* has an infinite number of powers (*sakti)* and the creative power (*Maya*) is one of them. The power is not separate from the powerful and hence there is no duality. The world as a whole and in all its parts has purpose.

For the purpose of carrying out the work of creation, preservation and destruction, God (*Isvara*) assumes three distinct names and forms, namely, Brahma, Visnu and Rudra (also known as Siva or Mahesha).

The doctrine clearly recognises that the highest level of truth is that the whole world and all that exists is *Maya* – an illusion, a dream, a mirage and a figment of imagination. Ultimately, the whole Universe is unreal, i.e. *Maya*. The only reality is *Brahma* (the Universal Soul) with which the individual soul is identical. The salvation of the individual soul is possible only by merging it with *Brahma*.

The post-Sankara period saw the elaboration of the doctrines of all the above mentioned schools of thoughts, and the evolution of each system in its own way in the light of criticism by others. There was a great development of dialectics in each school which led to highly technical and systematic works being written by thinkers.

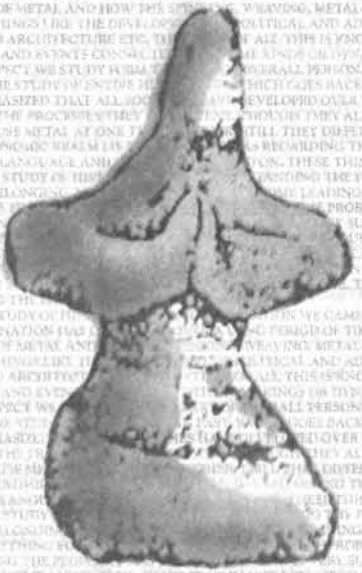
One of the great sages who differed with Sankara was Ramanuja, who wrote his own commentaries on the *Upanishads*, *Brahmasutras* and *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Exercises

1. Explain the following :
   Moksha, Atman, Maya, Karmakanda, Jnanakanda, Astika, Nastika
2. What is the aim of Indian philosophy? What are the characteristic features of it?
3. Describe the six schools of Indian Philosophy.
4. Write short notes on:
   (i) *Bhagavada-Gita*
   (ii) *Yo a*
   (iii) *Ny aya*
   (iv) *Ve anta*

Things to Do

- Find a teacher who teaches *yogasanas* and practice them at home.
- Find out the merits of these *yogasanas* and discuss them in class.



Chapter 12

The Evolution of Jainism and Buddhism

The brooding over the ills and sorrows of life, a passionate desire to remove them by finding out new mode of salvation became the concern of the learned.

THE SIXTH century B.C. may be regarded as an important landmark in the history of Indian culture. The old ritualistic Vedic tradition had gradually ceased to be a strong force. The *Upanishads* had initiated freedom of speculation into the fundamental problem of life. The brooding over the ills and sorrows of life, a passionate desire to remove them by finding out new mode of salvation became the concern of the learned. It created a ferment of new ideas and philosophic principles, leading to the establishment of numerous religious sects, which had never occurred in India before or since. We come to know of about 62 such religious sects, many of which were based on local customs and rituals. Of these religious sects, which may be regarded as direct or indirect products of thought currents of this period, we shall discuss mainly two sects which have greatly influenced the society and culture of India. These are Jainism and Buddhism.

It may be mentioned that both Jainism and Buddhism take their stand on certain aspects of the pre-existing system. Both are organised as ascetic orders and brotherhoods. Asceticism in fact, has its origin in the Vedic thought and has been directly encouraged by the *Upanishads*. The *Aranyakas* are the products of hermitages of the forests while the *Upanishads* recommend retirement to forests as essential to those who seek the highest knowledge. Both Jainism and Buddhism can be seen and understood better in this light.

Nirgranthas discuss as many as sixty-two systems of doctrines before Buddhism arose. Some Jain works like *Sutra-Kritanga* gives their number as 363. Some of these were *Ajivikas, Nirgranthas, Jatilakas,* etc. Some of the prominent teachers of these sects were Purana Kassapa, Makkhali Gosal, Ajitkeshakambalin, Nigantha Natputta and Sanjaya Belatthaputta.

Jainism

Jainism has great antiquity. The names of two Tirthankaras namely, Rishabhanath and Aristhanemia find mention in *RigVeda. Vayu Purana* and *Bhagwat Purana* mention Rishabha as the incarnation of Narayana. A few scholars believe that the nude torso found at Harappa belongs to some Tirthanakara. The Jain tradition traces Jainism to a remote antiquity represented by a succession of twenty-four Tirthankaras. The first Tirthankara was Rishabhnath. We do not know much about him except that the traditions say that he was a king and renounced the kingdom in favour of his son, Bharata, and became an ascetic. Some Puranic traditions say that name *Bharatavarsha* is after 'Bharata', the son of Rishabhanath. We know a little more about the twenty-third Tirthankara, Parsva, who was the son of Ikshvaku king Asvasena of Kasi and was born to the daughter of Naravanman, king of Kausasthala. He renounced the world at the age of thirty and attained perfect knowledge after nearly three months of intense meditation and spent the

remaining life as a religious teacher, till his death at the age of hundred. He is said to have flourished 250 years before Mahavira, the twenty-fourth Tirthankara. He, thus, lived in the eighth century B.C.

Vardhamana Mahavira is the last Tirthankara. He was born in the village Kundagrama near Vaisali about 540 B.C. His father Siddhartha was the head of famous kshatriya *Jnatrika* clan and his mother Trisala was the sister of Chetaka, an eminent Lichchhavi noble of Vaisali. Chetaka's daughter was married to Bimbisara, the king of Magadha.

According to some Jain traditions. Mahavira was married to Yasoda and lived a life of a householder. He had a daughter also. After the death of his parents, Vardhamana left his home, and became an ascetic at the age of thirty. During the next twelve years he practised most rigorous asceticism. At the age of 42, he attained *kaivalya* i.e. the supreme knowledge and final deliverance from the bonds of pleasure and pain. Henceforth, he came to be known as Mahavira and Jina or the conqueror. His followers came to be known as Jainas. Originally they were designated as *Nirgranthas*, i.e. free from fetters. Mahavira spent the remaining thirty years of his life in preaching. He passed away at Pawapuri, in 468 B.C. at the age of seventy two.

Vardhaman Mahavira accepted four doctrines of Parsva namely (i) non-injury to living beings, (ii) speaking the truth, (iii) non possession of property, and (iv) not stealing. To these four doctrines Mahavira added a fifth one, namely, celibacy. As an example of complete renunciation and free from any possessions Mahavira asked his followers to discard even their clothes.

Though the Jains did not deny the existence of God, they simply ignored him. The world for Jains is not created, maintained or destroyed by a God but functions through a universal or eternal law. The universe is eternal. It's existence is divided into cycles of progress (*utsarpini*) and declines (*avasarpini*). The universe functions through the interaction of living souls (*jiva*) and everything in the universe has a soul. The purification of the soul is the purpose of living, for it is only the pure soul after being released from the body that resides in bliss. The souls are found not only in the living beings like animals and plants but also in stones, rocks, water etc. The soul which has finally set itself free rises at once to the top of the universe, above the highest heaven, where it remains in an inactive omniscient bliss through eternity. This for the Jains is *Nirvana*.

According to Jainism salvation is possible only by abandoning all possessions, a long course of fasting, self-mortification, study and meditation. Hence, the monastic life is essential for salvation.

Chandragupta Maurya is said to have patronised Jainism. According to the Jaina tradition, Chandragupta not only accepted Jaina religion, but had actually abdicated the throne and died as a Jaina *Bhikshu* in southern India.

It is said that about two hundred years after the death of Mahavira a terrible famine broke out in Magadha. At that time Chandragupta Maurya was the king, and the *Thera* Bhadrabahu was the chief of the Jaina community. These two, with their followers, went to Karanataka, leaving Sthulabhadra incharge of the Jainas that remained in Magadha. Bhadrabahu convoked a council at Patliputra, in which the Jaina canon was arranged. Later in the fifth century A.D. it was further rearranged.

When the Jainas returned from south India, they held that complete nudity be an essential part of the teachings of Mahavira, while the monks in Magadha began to put on white clothes. Thus arose the two sects, the *Svetambaras* (those who put on white robes) and the *Digambaras* (those who were stark naked). It must be remembered that it is the *munis* who follow the strict code like wearing white clothes (*Svetambaras*) or not keeping even a small peice of cloth on themselves or remaining completely nude (*Digambaras*). The followers of both the sects live alike i.e. wearing clothes etc.

Buddhism

Like Jainism, Buddhism was also founded by an illustrious kshatriya. He was born in 566 B.C. His family name was Gautama who was born in *Sakya* clan. His father, Suddhodhan, was the king of *Sakya* republic. His mother was Mayadevi who died after seven days of his birth. The popular legend has it that an astrologer predicted that Gautama would either be a great *chakravartin samrat* or a great *sanyasin*. Fearing his son's reflective cast of mind, his father married him at an early age to beautiful Yasodhara from whom he had a son, Rahul. However, Gautama was horrified at the sight of an old man, a diseased person, a dead body, and then being attracted by the saintly appearance of an ascetic. One night he left his home, wife and son and renounced the worldly life. He studied for some time in the philosophical schools of two renowned teachers. Thereafter, six years of profound meditation led to the discovery of truths. Gautama became the Buddha i.e. the enlightened one.

The fundamental principle of Buddha's teachings are represented by the Four Noble Truths (*Arya-Satyas*) viz : (i) that the world is full of sorrow (*Dukkha*), (ii) that there are causes of sorrow (*Dukkha Samuddaya*), (iii) that this sorrow can be stopped (*dukkha nirodha*), and (iv) path leading to cessation of sorrow (*Dukkha nirodha-gamini-pratipada*). According to Buddha, root of all human misery was 'desire' and its annihilation was the surest way of ending unhappiness. He held that death was no escape from it, as it lead to rebirth and further suffering. One could get out of this chain of suffering and achieve the final salvation (*Nirvana*) by following the eight fold path. (*Ashtangika-marga*). These eight fold paths are : (i) right speech, (ii) right action, (iii) right means of livelihood, (iv) right exertion,

(v) right mindfulness, (vi) right meditation, (vii) right resolution, and (viii) right view. The ultimate aim of life is to attain *nirvana*, the eternal state of peace and bliss, which means freedom, from further birth and death. In some places Buddha is said to have summarised the whole process in three words viz. *Sila* (Right conduct), *Samadhi* (Right concentration) and *Prajna* (Right knowledge). The first two lead to the last one which is the direct cause of *nirvana* or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Buddha advocated "The Middle Path" in which extremes are avoided.

After enlightenment Buddha journeyed to the Deer Park (modern Sarnath) Kasi and gave his first sermon which is also known as "Set in Motion the Wheel of Law".

The moral doctrines preached by Buddha were quite simple. Man is arbiter of his own destiny and not any God or Gods. If he does good deed in his life, he will be reborn in a higher life and so on till he attains salvation or the final emancipation from the evils of birth. On the other hand, evil deeds are sure to be punished and the man will be reborn into lower and lower life, each life taking him further away from *nirvana*. Man should avoid both extremes, viz. a life of comforts and luxury, and a life of severe asceticism— the middle path was the best. In addition to the ordinary moral codes such as truthfulness, charity, purity and control over passions, Buddhism laid great stress on love, compassion, equanimity and non-injury to the living creatures in thought, word and deed. Buddhism denied the efficacy of Vedic rituals and practices for the purpose of salvation, and the superiority assumed by the brahmans.

The followers of the Buddha fell into two categories: the *Upasakas* or the lay followers, who lived with family; and the *Bhikshus* (monks) who renounced the world and led the life of an ascetic. They lived as a commune called *Sangha* founded by Buddha himself. The women were also admitted in *Sangha* and were known as *Bhikshunis*. All the members in Buddhism enjoyed equal rights irrespective of their varna and *jati*. Further, Buddha discoursed in the language of common people. For eight months Buddha and his followers would travel from place to place, preaching and four months during the rainy season they stayed at one place.

Buddha died at the age of 80 in the year 486 B.C. at Kushinagar. After the cremation, the ashes of Buddha were distributed among his followers. These ashes were kept in caskets and stupas were built over them. Sanchi Stupa is one such example.

Mahavira was a contemporary of Gautama Buddha, and there are striking resemblances in the doctrines of these two teachers. Both started with a frank recognition of the fact that the world is full of sorrows and the salvation of a man means his deliverance from the eternal chain of birth and death; both derived their basic principles from the *Upanishads*. Both did not accept the idea of God; both, laid great stress upon a pure

and moral life, specially non-injury to living beings, both emphasised the effects of good and bad deeds upon a man's future births and ultimate salvation; both decried caste; both preached their religion in the common language of the people, and lastly, both encouraged the idea of giving up the world, and organised a church of monks and nuns. We can trace distinct historic origins of the two, they differ in fundamental conceptions about salvation and certain other matters which cannot be explained away as later additions. The Jaina conception of soul, for example, is radically different from that of a Buddhist. Again, Jainism laid great stress upon asceticism and practised it in a very rigorous manner, whereas, Buddha decried it, and asked his disciples to follow the middle path between a life of ease and luxury on one hand, and rigorous asceticism on the other. Besides, Buddha denounced the practice of going out naked, and the Jaina attitude of non-injury to animals was carried to far greater excesses than was ever contemplated by Buddhism.

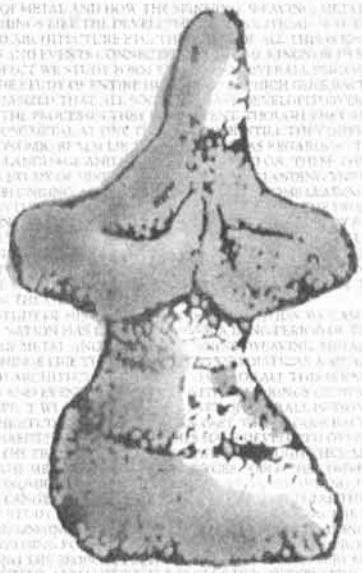
It may be said that within five hundred years Buddha spread far and wide in different parts of the world. However, Jainism never spread beyond the boundaries of India. On the other hand, while Buddhism declined considerably in the land of its birth Jainism is still a living force in India, and has got a stronghold upon a large and influential section of the people.

Exercises

1. Explain the following:
   Tirthankara, *Nirvana, Jina, Ashtangika-marga, Sangha, Bhikshu*.
2. Why the sixth century B.C. is called the landmark in the history of India?
3. Describe the Jain Tirthankaras. What are their main teachings?
4. Describe the main teachings of Buddhism.
5. Write short notes on:
   (i) Vardhamana Mahavira
   (ii) Gautama Buddha
   (iii) *Ajivikas*
6. Describe the similarities and differences between Jainism and Buddhism.

Things to Do

- On the outline map of India locate important places associated with Jainism and Buddhism. Describe the events associated with these places.



CHAPTER 13

MAHAJANAPADAS TO NANDAS

BY the time of the sixth century B.C., Panini mentions as many as 22 different Janapadas, of which three were considered very important. These were Magadha, Kosala and Vatsa.

Mahajanapadas

In the later Vedic period itself we start hearing of many Janapadas and Mahajanapadas. The names of at least nine Janapadas have been given in Vedic literature beside such people as the Andhras, Pulindas, Sabaras and Pundaras. However, by the time of the sixth century B.C. Panini mentions as many as 22 different Janapadas of which three were considered very important. These were Magadha, Kosala and Vatsa. A clearer picture emerges from the early Buddhist and Jain literature. They present a list of sixteen Mahajanapadas with minor variation of names in different works. Though the number is the same, the names in the lists differ. Perhaps they show the political conditions at different times and the geographical nearness or knowledge of the author. According to *Anguttara Nikaya* there were following Mahajanapadas:

(i) Anga (including the modern districts of Monghyr and Bhagalpur in Bihar) with its capital of Champa, (ii) Magadha (covering the districts of Patna, Gaya and parts of Shahabad) with its earlier capital at Rajgriha or Girivraj, (iii) Vajji (a confederacy of eight republican clans, situated to the north of the river Ganga in Bihar) with its capital, Vaisali, (iv) Malla (also a republican confederacy covering the modern districts of Deoria, Basti, Gorakhpur and Siddharthnagar in eastern Uttar Pradesh) with two capitals at Kusinara and Pawa, (v) Kasi with its capital at Varanasi, (vi) Kosala (covering the present districts of Faizabad, Gonda, Bahraich etc.), with its capital at Sravasti, (vii) Vatsa (covering the modern districts Allahabad, Mirzapur etc.), with its capital at Kausambi (viii) Chedi, (covering the modern Bundelkhand area with its capital at Shuktimati), (ix) Kuru (covering the modern Haryana and Delhi area to the west of river Yamuna) with its capital at Indraprastha (modern Delhi), (x) Panchala (covering the area of western Uttar Pradesh up to the east of river Yamuna upto the Kosala Janapada) with its capital at Ahichhatra, (xi) Surasena, (covering Brij Mandal with its capital at Mathura), (xii) Matsya (covering the area of Alwar, Bharatpur and Jaipur in Rajasthan) (xiii) Avanti (modern Malawa) with its capital at Ujjayini and Mahishmati, (xiv) Ashmaka (between the rivers Narmada and Godavari) with its capital at Potana, (xv) Gandhara (area covering the western part of Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan) with its capitals at Taxila and Pushkalavati, and (xvi) Kamboja (identified with modern district of Hazara disricts of Pakistan).

Obviously this list of sixteen Mahajanapadas covers India only from Bihar in the east to Afghanistan in the west, and Hindukush in the north to river Godavari in the south. It leaves out vast areas of Bengal and eastern India and practically the whole of south India. But these very Buddhist texts show familiarity with whole of India. *Mahagovinda Sutta* of *Digha Nikaya* describe the shape of India as rectangular in the north and triangular

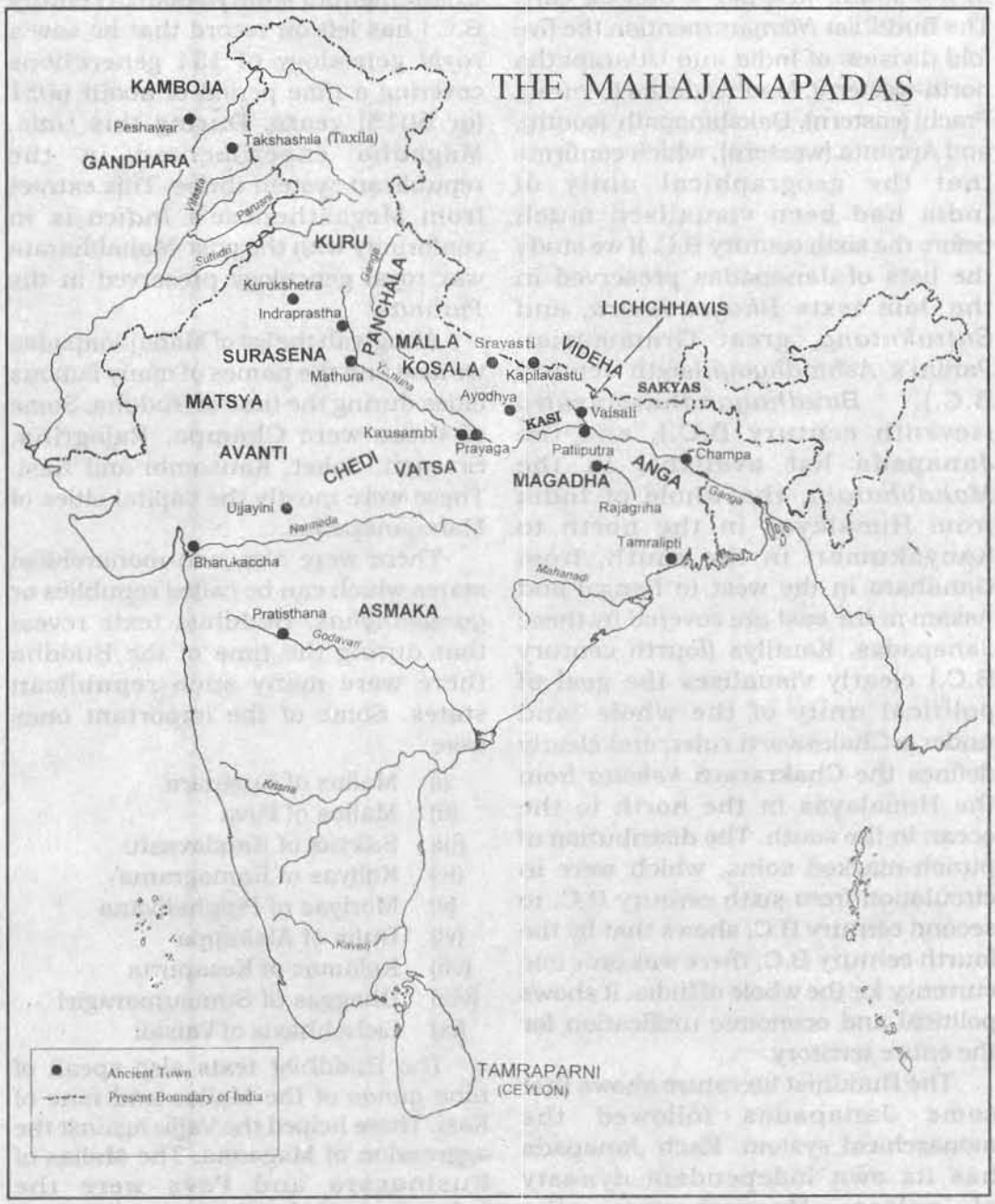


Fig. 13.1 *Map of Mahajanapadas*

in the south, just like a bullock cart. The Buddhist *Nikayas* mention the five fold division of India into Uttarapatha north-western), Madhyadesha (central), Prachi (eastern), Dakshinapath (south), and Apranta (western), which confirms that the geographical unity of India had been visualised much before the sixth century B.C. If we study the lists of Janapadas preserved in the Jain texts *Bhagvatisutra*, and *Sutrakntang*, great Grammarian Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* (sixth century B.C.), *Baudhayandharmasutra* (seventh century B.C.), and the Janapada list available in the *Mahabharata*, the whole of India from Himalayas in the north to Kanyakumari in the south, from Gandhara in the west to Bengal and Assam in the east are covered by these Janapadas. Kautilya (fourth century B.C.) clearly visualises the goal of political unity of the whole land under a Chakravarti ruler, and clearly defines the Chakravarti *kshetra* from the Himalayas in the north to the ocean in the south. The distribution of punch-marked coins, which were in circulation from sixth century B.C. to second century B.C. shows that by the fourth century B.C. there was only one currency for the whole of India. It shows political and economic unification for the entire territory.

The Buddhist literature shows that some Janapadas followed the monarchical system. Each Janapada has its own independent dynasty of rulers. Megasthenese, the Greek ambassador in the court of Chandragupta Maurya (fourth century B.C.) has left on record that he saw a royal genealogy of 151 generations covering a time period of about 6051 (or 6015) years. During this time, Magadha experimented in the republican system thrice. This extract from Megasthenese's *Indica* is in conformity with the post-Mahabharata war royal genealogy preserved in the *Puranas*.

Along with the list of Mahajanapadas we also find the names of many famous cities during the time of Buddha. Some of these were Champa, Rajagriha, Sravasti, Saket, Kausambi and Kasi. These were mostly the capital cities of Mahajanapadas.

There were also non-monarchical states which can be called republics or *ganasanghas*. Buddhist texts reveal that during the time of the Buddha there were many such republican states. Some of the important ones were:

(i) Mallas of Kusinara
(ii) Mallas of Pava
(iii) Sakyas of Kapilavastu
(iv) Koliyas of Ramagrama
(v) Moriyas of Pipphalivana
(vi) Bulis of Alakappa
(vii) Kalamas of Kesaputta
(viii) Bhaggas of Sumsumaragiri
(ix) Lichchhavis of Vaisali

The Buddhist texts also speak of nine *ganas* of the Mallas and nine of Kasi. These helped the Vajjis against the aggression of Magadha. The Mallas of Kusinagara and Pava were the kshatriyas of the Ikshvaku dynasty. According to *Divyavadana*, perhaps at

the time of Buddha, the Mallas were divided into two branches, namely Kusinara (Kusinagara) and Pava in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Perhaps they also formed a *sangha* of nine republican states.

The Sakyas of Kapilavastu, modern Piparahwa in the Siddharthanagar district of Uttar Pradesh on the Nepal border, were also Ikshvaku kshatriyas. Gautama Buddha was born in the Sakya family and Suddhodana was the 'King' of the Sakyas. The Koliyas of Ramagrama were eastern neighbours of the Sakyas.

***Fig. 13.2** Punch-marked Coins*

The Moriyas of the Pipphalivana also claimed to be a kshatriya. According to *Mahavamsa,* Chandragupta Maurya belonged to this kshatriya clan.

We do not have much information about the *Bulis* of Allakappa, Kalamas of Kesaputta and Bhaggas of Sumsumaragiri.

The Vajjis were the most important republican state during the period of Buddha. They were settled on the northern side of the Ganga, while Magadha was on the south. Vajji was a confederation of eight *ganas* among which the Lichchhavis were most prominent. These were called *astakulika* (eight families). Vajjis, Lichchhavis, Videhas and Jnatrika were important families. Mahavira, the twenty-fourth Jaina Tirthankara was born in the last mentioned family. During the time of Buddha, the Lichchhavis, under the leadership of Chetaka, were the most prominent *gana* in the Vajji *sangha.* They are also called kshatriyas. The Vajjis were defeated and assimilated in the Magadha empire by Ajatasatru.

The Rise of Magadha

The four important royal dynasties that stand out prominently in the sixth century B.C. are the Haryankas of Magadha, the Ikshvakus of Kosala, the Pauravas of Vatsa and the Pradyotas of Avanti. Haryanka is the name of a new dynasty founded in Magadha by Bimbisara after overthrowing the Brihadrathas. The Pradyotas are so called after the founder Pradyota. The

other two are old royal dynasties. It is interesting to note that the kingdom of Kuru-Panchala, Kasi and Matsya, celebrated in the *Mahabharata*, continued in this period, although they ranked as minor powers.

There were matrimonial alliances between the kings of many of these states, but that did not prevent the outbreak of hostility among them. Each of the four important royal dynasties, mentioned above, tried to establish its

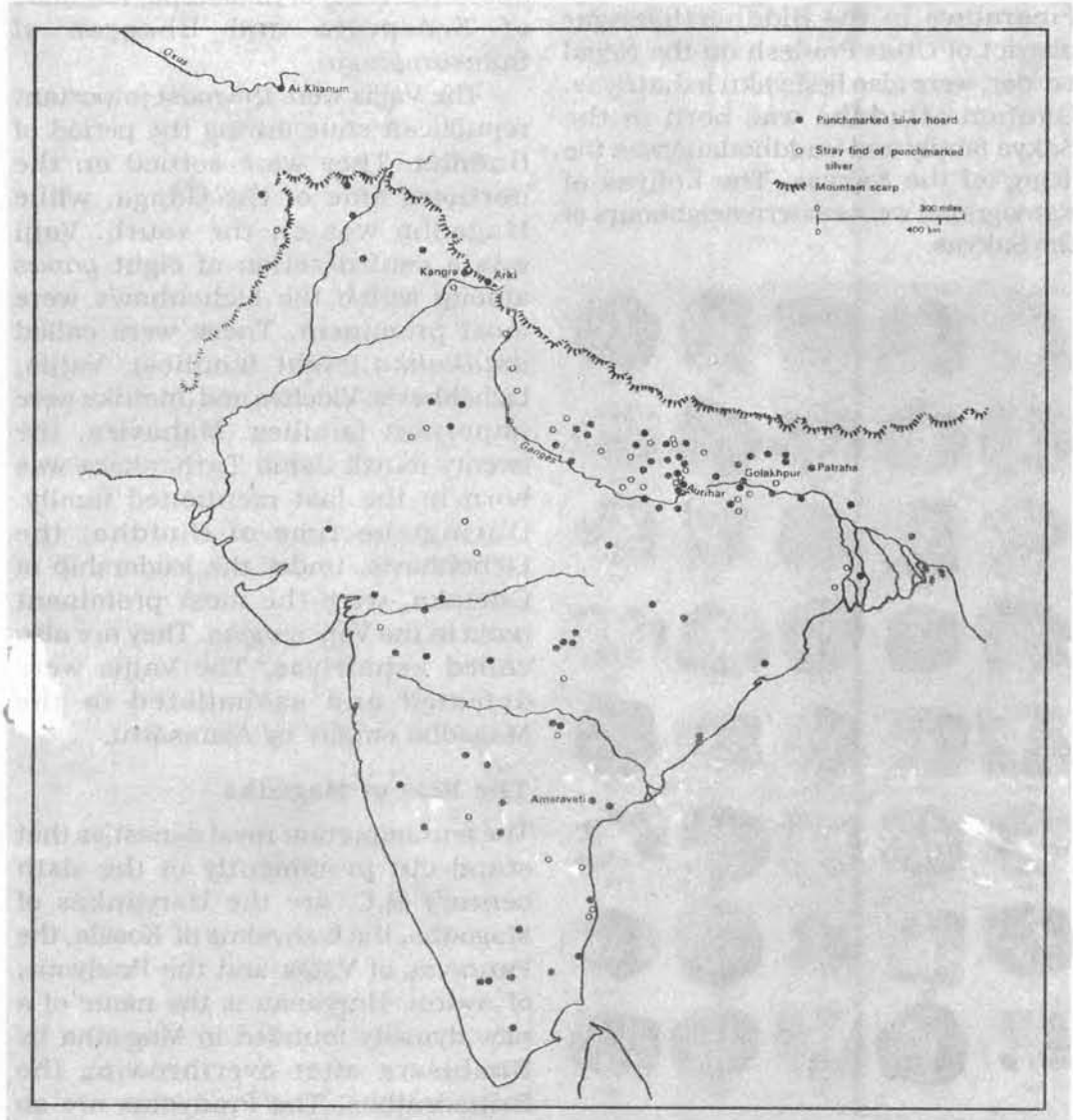


***Fig. 13.3** Distribution of Silver Punch-marked Coins*

supremacy, and aggrandise itself at the cost of minor States. We hear, for example, that Pradyota, king of Avanti, fought with Udayana, king of Kausambi, although the latter was his son-in-law, and at another time he threatened Rajagriha, the capital of Magadha. Prasenajit, king of Kosala, was already the master of Kasi, and his son afterwards conquered the Sakya state of Kapilavastu. Again, Bimbisara, king of Magadha, annexed Anga, and his son Ajatasatru conquered the Lichchhavis of Vaisali. All these kings – Pradyota, Udayana, Bimbisara and Prasenajit – flourished in the second half of the sixth century B.C.

At the beginning of the fifth century B.C., the Pauravas and the Pradyotas seem to have retired from the contest for supremacy, which was thus left to be fought out between the Haryankas of Magadha, and the Ikshvakus of Kosala. A fierce and protracted struggle ensued between Prasenajit and Ajatasatru, and although the results were indecisive for a long time, victory ultimately went to the Magadha kingdom. Henceforth, Magadha stands out as the supreme power in northern India, which finally culminated into one of the greatest empires that had ever been seen. Ajatasatru, became the founder of Magadhan supramacy. He died about 475 B.C. and was succeeded by Udayi, to whom tradition ascribes the foundation of Pataliputra, the new capital of the Magadha kingdom. As described in epic literature, Rajagriha, now represented by the ruins at Rajgir in the Patna district, served as the capital of the Magadha kingdom. While Ajatasatru was fighting against the Lichchhavis, he built, as a defensive measure, a fortress at Pataligrama, a village at the junction of the Ganga and the Son. In course of time, the strategic importance of the place must have attracted the attention of the statesmen of Magadha, and Udayi evidently thought it a more suitable capital for his kingdom, which had extended its boundaries in all directions by then.

Sisunaga

According to the Buddhist tradition Udayi and his three successors were all unworthy to rule. So the people got disgusted and elected Sisunaga as the king, the minister of the last king. The *Puranas*, however, take Sisunaga to be the founder of the royal line to which Bimbisara belonged, and hence calls it the Sisunaga Dynasty.

Nanda Dynasty

Kalasoka, the son and the successor of Sisunaga, was succeeded by a barber (according to some accounts) named Mahapadma Nanda, who founded a new dynasty known as the Nandas. Mahapadma seems to have been a great military genius. He defeated and destroyed the far-famed kshatriya families, such as the Pauravas, the Ikshvakus, and the Pradyotas, who were ruling in Kausambi, Kosala and Avanti, and established an empire which included the greater part of northern India. Thus, the task begun by Bimbisara and Ajatasatru made triumphant progress.

Foreign Invasions

Persian conquest of Indian Borderland

The western borderland of India comprising the Punjab, Sindh and Afghanistan did not have any strong political power during this period. Of the sixteen Mahajanapadas mentioned in the literature, only two, Kamboja and Gandhara, may be placed in this outlying region. It appears to have been divided into a large number of independent principalities which were frequently at war with one another, and thus an easy prey to foreign invaders.

The powerful Achaemenian kings of Persia naturally cast their eyes towards this region, and perhaps Cyrus (558-530 B.C.) subjugated a number of principalities living to the south of the Hindukush mountains. It was in the reign of Darius (522-486 B.C.) that we have positive evidence of the extension of Achaemenian rule in the north-western part of India. Two inscriptions of this monarch mention "Hi(n)du" as a part of his dominion. The exact connotation of this term is not known, but it certainly comprised some territory to the east of the Sindhu, which Darius must have conquered about 518 B.C. Herodotus, the Greek historian, tells us that in 517 B.C. Darius sent a naval expedition to explore the valley of the Sindhu river.

How long the Persian domination lasted in India is not definitely known. Its continuance up to about 330 B.C. is generally presumed on the ground that the Indian soldiers formed part of the Achaemenian army that conquered Greece in the time of Xerxes (486-465 B.C.) and fought against Alexander at Gaugamela in 330 B.C. But this is by no means a sure conclusion, as the Indians might have been a part of the army.

Alexander's Campaign

In the fourth century B.C. the Greeks and Persian fought with each other for the supremacy over western Asia. The defeat of Achaemenian king Darius III in the hands of Alexander became a turning point. Alexander dismantled the Persian empire, conquered most of the western Asia including Iraq and Iran. He then turned his attention to India. After the conquest of the Persian empire Alexander marched to India through the Khyber pass in 326 B.C.

It is interesting to know that the history of Alexander's campaign of India is reconstructed on the basis of accounts available in Greek and Roman sources. Surprisingly, no Indian source mentions anything about Alexander or his campaign.

It is also surprising that while Greek sources give a very detailed account of Alexander's campaign to India, they are completely silent about Kautilya. However, the identification of Sandrocottas or Androcottas of Greek sources with that of Chandragupta Maurya and fixing 326 B.C. as the date of Chandragupta's accession to the throne has become the sheet anchor of the chronological framework of Indian history.

Once Alexander reached the Indian soil, the king of Takshasila (Taxila, near Rawalpindi in Punjab) offered to help Alexander. Only a couple of Indian princes followed the ignoble example of Taxila. Most of the numerous kings and republican Chiefs in Afghanistan, Punjab and Sindh offered brave resistance, though in vain. Despite the fact that petty chieftains were no match for the seasoned troops of Alexander and knew that they had no chance of success, they refused to submit without a fight. The Greek writers have paid glowing tributes to the bravery and patriotism of a large number of them.

After crossing the Hindukush, Alexander divided his army into two parts. One part was kept under his own command and the other under the two of his best Generals. Alexander himself undertook the task of conquering the north-western part of India. The Greeks had to face a strong resistance from Hasti, a tribal chief whose capital was Pushkalavati. He stood the Greek siege for full 30 days till he fell fighting. These local people fought the invader to the last man. When the king of Assakenoi fell fighting, his army was led by the queen. They "resolved to defend their country to the last extremity". So great was the enthusiasm for the defence of the country that even women took part in fighting. Even the mercenaries "preferred a glorious death to a life with dishonour". After a brave resistance of several days, Massaga, the capital city, was captured by Alexander. The mercenary army of 7000 were granted their lives by a special agreement which Alexander had himself concluded with them. But in the night they were surrounded and slaughtered mercilessly by him and his soldiers. This massacre has been condemned even by the Greek writers.

After defeating Assakenoi and others Alexander joined his other division of army. A bridge was constructed on the Indus river at Ohind about 24 km. above Attock. After crossing the Indus Alexander proceeded towards Taxila. When he was about 7 km. from Taxila, Ambhi came forward to great Alexander and recognised him as his sovereign.

However, the most powerful among the north-western Indian was the ruler of a kingdom between the Jhelum and the Chenab whom the Greeks call Porus, probably a corruption of Paurava. When he was summoned by Alexander's envoys he proudly replied that he would undoubtedly do so, but at his own frontiers and with arms. Alexander made elaborate preparations to fight him. It must be remembered that Porus was a ruler of a small state, perhaps not bigger than a modern district in the Punjab. Porus fought bravely and with nine wounds on his body, was led a captive before Alexander. The latter asked him how he would like to be treated. "Like a King" came the proud and prompt reply. Alexander secured the alliance of this brave king by restoring his kingdom and adding to it the territories of "15 republican states with their 5000 cities and villages without number". In course of his advance to the next river,

Beas, Alexander had to fight hard with the Kathaioi (Kathas) whose casualties amounted to 17,000 killed and 70,000 captured.

Alexander's Retreat

Alexander's advance was arrested on the bank of the Beas, for his soldiers mutinied and refused to proceed further (end of July 326 B.C.). It is difficult to say whether this insubordination of the soldiers was due to merely war-weariness, as represented by the Greek writers, or partly to the fear inspired by the mighty empire of the Nandas which lay beyond the river. But it is interesting to note that in course of their reply to Alexander's pleading to go on further, the troops laid great stress on the calamity that would befall the whole army if Alexander met with an accident in course of the campaign. While saying this the heroic resistance and patriotic spirit displayed by the whole population of the tiny republics must have loomed large over the soldiers. Many ancient Greek historians have recorded that the retreat was because of the terror of mighty powers of the Nanda empire.

Whatever may be the real reason, Alexander had to bow to the decision of his mutinous soldiers and decided to return. Near the confluence of the Jhelum with the Chenab he had to fight with a confederacy of republican states led by the Malloi (Malavas) and the Oxydrakai (Kshudrakas). All the towns of the Malavas became citadels of resistance. In one of them, 5000 brahmans left the pen for the sword and died fighting and only a few being taken prisoners. While taking another town by assault Alexander was severely wounded, and when it was captured, his infuriated soldiers killed everybody they found irrespective of age and sex. Another *ganasanghas*, the Agalassoi (Arjunayanas) also fought with great valour, and when one of their towns was captured by Alexander all the citizens, numbering 20,000, after a heroic resistance, threw themselves into the fire with their wives and children. There is a long list of such sagas of bravery, patriotism and sacrifice. In September 325 B.C. Alexander reached Patala, and began his homeward journey. He proceeded with his army by land, but sent the ships under Nearchus. Alexander reached Susa in Persia in 324 B.C. and died there the next year. Before leaving India, he had put several kshtrapas incharge of different parts of the conquered territories. But some conquered *ganasanghas* rebelled and there were other troubles even before he left India. After his death the Greek edifice collapsed within a short time.

Impact of Alexander's Campaign

The invasion of Alexander the Great has been recorded in minute details by the Greek historians who naturally felt elated at the triumphant progress of their hero. It is a great puzzle that why Indian tradition should have remained silent over such an event. Was it because Alexander only touched the western border of the then India and returned without leaving any lasting impact on

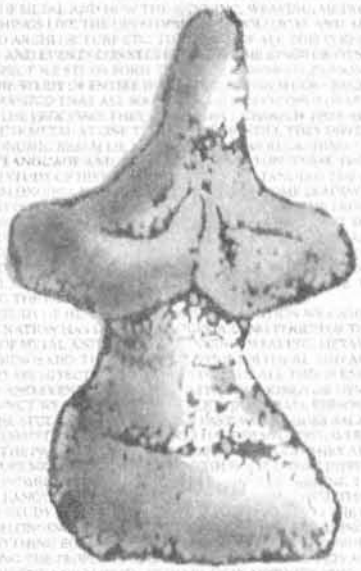
Indian people. His campaign can hardly be called a great military success as the only military achievement to his credit was the conquest of petty *ganasanghas* and small states. The exertion he and his army had to make against Porus, the ruler of a small state, do not certainly favour the hypothesis that he could have faced the might of Nandas with ease. Further, whatever little he could conquer in this campaign was lost within three months of his departure, as most of the conquered areas asserted their independence.

Exercises

1. Describe the political condition of India in the sixth century B.C. with reference to the rise of Mahajanpadas.
2. Describe the *ganasanghas* (Republics) in the sixth century B.C.
3. Discuss the rise of Magadha. What were the methods adopted by Magadhan kings of various dynasties for the expansion of Magadha ?
4. Who was Alexander? Discuss his invasion of north-west India.

Things to Do

- Draw the map of India and locate Mahajanpadas with their capitals.



Chapter 14

The Mauryas

The Mauryan empire was the first and one of the greatest empires that were established on Indian soil. The vast Mauryan empire stretching from the valley of the Oxus to the delta of Kaveri was given a well-knit, common administration.

THE MAURYAN empire was the first and one of the greatest empires that were established on Indian soil. The vast Mauryan empire stretching from the valley of the Oxus to the delta of Kaveri was given a well-knit, common administration. Chandragupta Maurya was the first ruler who unified entire India under one political unit. About Mauryan rulers we have epigraphical sources, literary sources, foreign accounts and materials obtained from archaeological excavations. The *Arthashastra* gives us detailed information about the administrative system of the Mauryan empire. The work was written by Kautilya who is also known as Chanakya. Some scholars think that Kautilya was the real architect of the Mauryan empire and was also the Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya. Megasthenese, the Greek ambassador from the court of Seleucus to that of Chandragupta Maurya, wrote accounts of India and Indian people. His book *Indica* is lost but some fragments of it are known to us in the form of quotations in the works of the later Greek writers. Despite some discrepancies and inaccuracies in the information provided by Megasthenese it is, nevertheless, an useful source. However, the most important and authentic source for the history of Mauryan period is provided by the inscriptions of Ashoka.

Chandragupta Maurya (324-300 B.C.)

Not much is known about the early life and ancestry of Chandragupta. The Buddhist sources like *Mahavamsa* and *Dipavamsa* describe Chandragupta Maurya as a scion of the Kshatriya clan of the Moriyas branch of Sakyas who lived in Pipphalivana, in eastern Uttar Pradesh. The *Mudrarakshasa,* a play written by Vishakha Datta, uses the terms like *Vrishala* and *Kulahina,* for Chandragupta which mean a person of humble origin. Justin, a Greek writer, also says that Chandragupta was "born in humble life".

According to Buddhist sources Chandragupta's father was killed in a battle and he was brought up by his maternal uncle. Chanakya, finding the signs of royalty in the child Chandragupta, took him as his pupil, and educated him at Taxila which was then a great centre of learning. Chandragupta's early life and education at Taxila is indirectly proved by the fact that the Greek sources tell us that he had seen Alexander in course of the latter's campaign of Punjab.

The details of Chandragupta's conquests and empire building process are not available to us. From the Greek and Jain sources it seems that Chandragupta took advantage of the disturbances caused by the invasion of Alexander and his sudden death in 323 B.C. in Babylon. He, with the help of Kautilya raised a large army and launched campaigns. He first overthrew the Greek kshatrapas ruling in the region of north-western India. Justin writes, "India after the death of Alexander, had shaken, as it were, the

yoke of servitude from its neck and put his Governors to death. The architect of this liberation was Sandrocottas". Sandrocottas of Greek writers has been identified with Chandragupta Maurya.

After liberating north-western India from the Greek rule, Chandragupta turned his attention to the conquest of Magadha from the Nandas. The details of this conquest is not known to us. The Jain text, *Parisistha Parvam*, describes that with the help of Chanakya, Chandragupta defeated the Nanda king and captured him. After defeating Nanda, Chandragupta became the ruler of Magadha empire.

Chandragupta's western and southern Indian conquests are known to us through indirect evidences. The Junagarh rock inscription of Rudradaman says that a dam on the Sudarshana lake for irrigation was constructed by Pushyagupta, a provincial governor of Chandragupta Maurya. Later, *Yavanaraja* Tushapha excavated canals for irrigation during Ashoka's reign. Similarly, the find of Ashokan inscriptions at Girnar hills in Junagarh district (in Gujarat) and at Sopara (Thane district, Maharashtra) shows that these areas formed part of Mauryan empire.

Ashoka's inscriptions have been found at Maski, Yerragudi and Chitaldurga in Karnataka. Rock Edict II and XIII of Ashoka mentions that his immediate neighbouring states were those of Cholas, Pandyas, Satyaputras and Keralaputras. Since Ashoka and his father Bindusara are not known to have made conquest in south India, it can be said that it was conquered by Chandragupta. This conclusion is further strengthened by the Jain tradition which says that in his old age Chandragupta abdicated the throne and retired to Sravanbelgola in Karnataka with his teacher, the Jain ascetic Bhadrabahu. Local inscriptions of later period refer to his giving up life as a devout Jaina by fast unto death at that place. There is a hill nearby called Chandragiri, which seems to be named after him.

Chandragupta defeated the invading army of the Greek Kshatrapa Seleucus who had succeeded Alexander in the eastern part of his empire. This victory was achieved in about 305 B.C. The Greek writers do not give details of the war but state that a treaty was concluded in which Seleucus conceded the territories of Kandahar, Kabul, Herat and Baluchistan and Chandragupta presented him 500 elephants. It is also stated that this also led to the matrimonial alliance between the two — perhaps Seleucus married his daughter to Chandragupta Maurya or to his son Bindusara. Seleucus sent Megasthenese as his ambassador to the court of Chandragupta. Plutarch writes, "Sandrocottas who had by that time mounted the throne overran and subdued the whole of India with an army of 6,00,000".

Thus, Chandragupta established a vast empire which with the exception of Kalinga, extended from Afghanistan in the west to Assam in the east and

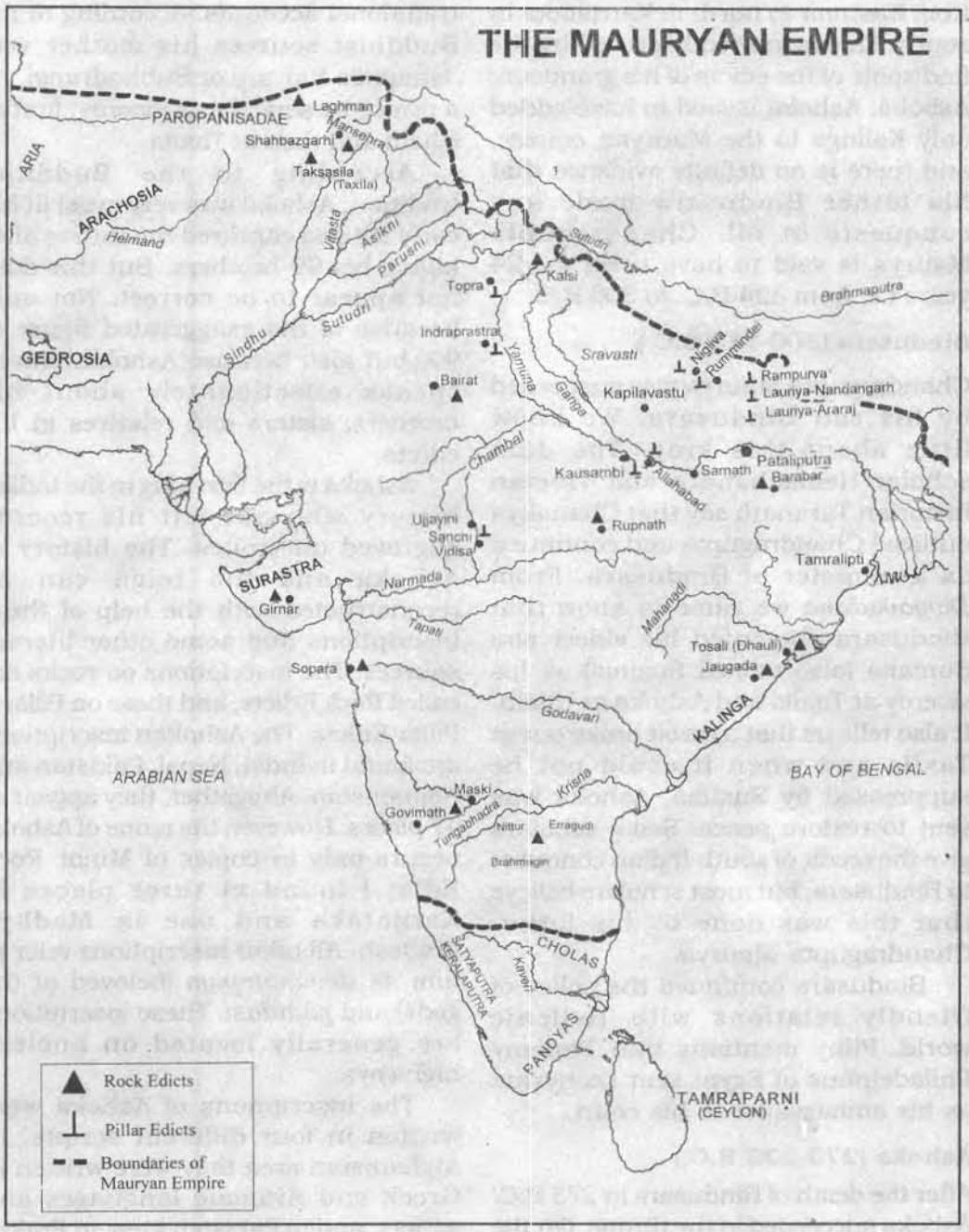


***Fig. 14.1** Map of the Mauryan Empire*

from Kashmir in north to Karnataka in south. This is indirectly proved by the find spots of the edicts of his grandson, Ashoka. Ashoka is said to have added only Kalinga to the Mauryan empire, and there is no definite evidence that his father Bindusara made any conquests at all. Chandragupta Maurya is said to have ruled for 24 years i.e. from 324 B.C. to 300 B.C.

Bindusara (300-273 B.C.)

Chandragupta Maurya was succeeded by his son Bindusara. We know little about this king. The Jain scholar Hemachandra and Tibetan historian Taranath say that Chanakya outlived Chandragupta and continued as a minister of Bindusara. From *Divyavadana* we came to know that Bindusara appointed his eldest son Sumana (also named Susima) as his viceroy at Taxila and Ashoka at Ujjain. It also tells us that a revolt broke out at Taxila and when it could not be suppressed by Susima, Ashoka was sent to restore peace. Some scholars give the credit of south Indian conquest to Bindusara, but most scholars believe that this was done by his father Chandragupta Maurya.

Bindusara continued the policy of friendly relations with Hellenic world. Pliny mentions that Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt sent Dionysius as his ambassador to his court.

Ashoka (273-232 B.C.)

After the death of Bindusara in 273 B.C. Ashoka succeeded to the throne. On the early life of Ashoka we have only traditional accounts. According to the Buddhist sources his mother was Janapada Kalyani or Subhadrangi. As a prince he served as a viceroy, first at Ujjain and then at Taxila.

According to the Buddhist tradition, Ashoka was very cruel in his early life and captured the throne after killing his 99 brothers. But this does not appear to be correct. Not only because of the exaggerated figure of 99, but also because Ashoka himself speaks affectionately about his brothers, sisters and relatives in his edicts.

Ashoka is the first king in the Indian history who has left his records engraved on stones. The history of Ashoka and his reign can be reconstructed with the help of these inscriptions and some other literary sources. The inscriptions on rocks are called Rock Edicts, and those on Pillars, Pillar Edicts. The Ashokan inscriptions are found in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Altogether, they appear at 47 places. However, the name of Ashoka occurs only in copies of Minor Rock Edict I found at three places in Karnataka and one in Madhya Pradesh. All other inscriptions refer to him as *devanampiya* (beloved of the gods) and *piyadasi*. These inscriptions are generally located on ancient highways.

The inscriptions of Ashoka were written in four different scripts. In Afghanistan area they were written in Greek and Aramaic languages and scripts, and in Pakistan area, in Prakrit language and Kharosthi script.

Inscriptions from all other areas are in Prakrit language, written in Brahmi script.

Kalinga War and Its Impact

The earliest event of Ashoka's reign recorded in his inscriptions is his conquest of Kalinga (modern Orissa and probably some adjoining areas) in the eighth year of his reign. This turned out to be the first and also the last battle fought by him. The Rock Edict XIII describes vividly the horrors and miseries of this war and its impact on Ashoka. According to this edict, one lakh people were killed in this war, several lakhs perished and a lakh and a half were taken prisoners. These numbers may be exaggerated but one fact comes out clearly that this war had a devastating affect on the people of Kalinga. The horrors of war completely changed the personality of Ashoka. He felt great remorse for the atrocities the war brought in its wake. He thus abandoned the policy of aggression and tried to conquer the hearts of the people. The drums declaring wars were replaced by the drums announcing ethical and moral principles with *dhammaghosa*. He took steps for the welfare of people and animals. He sent ambassadors of peace to the Greek kingdoms in west Asia and several other countries.

But this did not mean that he became a weak hearted pacifist. Contrary to this he warned people that these good measures may not be taken as a sign of weakness. If need be, he would not hesitate in dealing severely with the erring. He did not pursue the policy of peace for the sake of peace and under all conditions. Within the empire he appointed a class of officers known as *rajjukas* who were vested with the authority of not only rewarding people but also punishing them if required.

Ashoka's Dhamma

There is no doubt that Ashoka's personal religion was Buddhism. In his Bhabru edict he says he had full faith in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

Though Ashoka accepted Buddhism as his main faith, it would be wrong to think that he forced Buddhist ideals on his subjects. He showed respect to all sects and faiths and believed in unity among ethical and moral values of all sects. In Rock Edict VII he says, "All sects desire both self control and purity of mind". In Rock Edict XII he pronounces his policy of equal respect to all religious sects more clearly. He says, that he "honours all sects and both ascetics and laymen, with gifts and various forms of recognition".

After the Kalinga war, the greatest ideal and objective before Ashoka was the propagation of Dhamma. The Dhamma, as explained in Ashoka's edicts is not a religion or a religious system but a 'Moral Law', a 'Common Code of Conduct' or an 'Ethical Order'. In Pillar Edict II Ashoka himself puts the question: "What is Dhamma?" Then he enumerates the two basic attributes or constituents of Dhamma : less evil and many good deeds. He says such evils as rage, cruelty, anger, pride and

envy are to be avoided and many good deeds like kindness, liberality, truthfulness, gentleness, self control, purity of heart, attachment to morality, inner and outer purity etc. – are to be pursued vigorously.

Ashoka, in Rock Edict XII and many other edicts prescribes the following codes to be followed:

(i) Obedience to mother and father, elders, teachers and other respectable persons.

Fig. 14.2 *Ashokan Edict Engraved on a Pillar*

(ii) Respect towards teachers.
(iii) Proper treatment towards ascetics, relations, slaves, servants and dependents, the poor and miserable, friends, acquaintances and companions.
(iv) Liberality towards ascetics, friends, comrades, relatives and the aged.
(v) Abstention from killing of living beings.
(vi) Non-injury to all living creatures.
(vii) Spending little and accumulating little wealth.
(viii) Mildness in case of all living creatures.
(ix) Truthfulness.
(x) Attachment to morality.
(xi) Purity of heart.

Thus, Ashoka tried to instill moral law (Dhamma) as the governing principle and forced in every sphere of life. Dhamma of Ashoka, thus, is a code for moral and virtuous life. He never discussed god or soul or religion as such. He asked people to have control over their passion, to cultivate purity of life and character in innermost thoughts, to be tolerant to other religions, to abstain from killing or injuring animals and to have regard for them, to be charitable to all, to be respectful to parents, teachers, relatives, friends, and ascetics, to treat slaves and servant kindly and above all to tell the truth.

Ashoka not only preached but also practiced these principles. He gave up hunting and killing of animals. He established hospitals for humans and animals and made liberal donations to

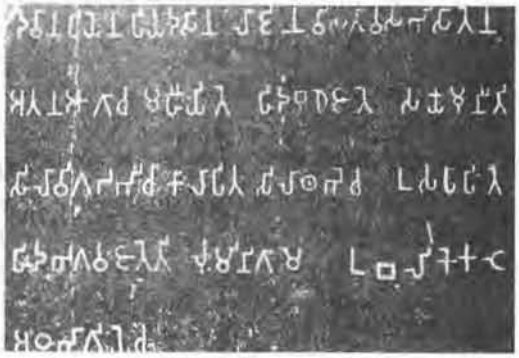


Fig. 14.3 *Rummindei Pillar Inscription*

the brahmans and ascetics of different religious sects. He erected rest-houses, caused wells to be dug and trees to be planted along the roads.

After the Kalinga war Ashoka adopted Buddhism, one of whose cardinal doctrines was non-violence and non-injury to living beings. Ashoka took for the propagation of Buddhism. He conducted *Dharmayatras* and instructed his officials to do the same. He appointed special class of officials called *Dharmamahamatras* whose sole responsibility was to propagate Dhamma among the people.

Ashoka sent missions to foreign countries also to propagate dhamma. His missionaries went to western Asia, Egypt and Eastern Europe. Of the foreign kings, whose kingdoms thus received the message of Buddhism; five are mentioned in the inscriptions of Ashoka, namely, Antiochus Theos, of Syria and western Asia, Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt, Antigonus Gonatas of Macedonia, Megas of Cyrene and Alexander of Epirus. The king even sent his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra to propagate Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Ashoka's Place in History

Ashoka was one of the greatest kings in the history of the world. His reign constitutes one of the "rare and lighting epochs in the annals of nations". The most remarkable thing about Ashoka is that his faith in Buddhism never made him to neglect his duties as a king and impose it on his subjects. His greatness lay in his realisation of the values of life. His conception of duties and responsibilities of a king, the zeal with which he succeeded in giving effect to them are shining examples of his greatness. Probably no ruler has ever expressed the relation between a king and his subjects in such a simple and noble language. He declared, "All men are my children and just as I desire for my children that they may enjoy every kind of prosperity and happiness, in both this world and the next, so also I desire the same for all men".

Ashoka is the only king in the history of human kind who apologised to his conquered subject for having waged war against them and caused them misery and sufferings. The Rock Edict XIII is a moving document which could have been written only by a human being as noble and as great as Ashoka.

Decline of the Mauryan Empire

Ashoka ruled for over forty years and met with his death in 232 B.C. the decline set in and soon after the empire broke up. Seven kings followed Ashoka

in succession in a period of about 50 years. It is impossible to construct a continuous history of the empire after Ashoka. Perhaps, after the death of Ashoka, the empire was divided into an eastern and an western part. The western part was governed by Kunala, Samprati and others and the eastern part with southern India, with its capital at Pataliputra, by six later Mauryan kings from Dasarath to Brihadratha. The revolt of the Andhras in the south and victorious raids of Greek king in the west gave a blow to the power and prestige of the Mauryan empire. Apparently due to concern for the empire and total disillusionment on kings unworthiness, Pushyamitra, the commander-in-chief killed the king Brihadratha while he was reviewing the army. Too little is known of the actual circumstances leading to such an act. However, what is very clear is that the king was killed in full view of the public, and that too in the presence of his army, this shows that he neither enjoyed the loyality of his own army nor the sympathy of the people. This is the only recorded and undisputed incident in the history of India till the twelfth century A.D. where the king was murdered and replaced. Though Pushyamitra, ascended the throne, curiously enough, he retained the title of the *Senapati*. He did not adopt any title declaring himself as the king.

There is something very dramatic in the way in which Mauryan empire declined and disappeared just in 50 years after the death of Ashoka. Historians have given various reasons for it. Most of the historians agree that after Ashoka, his successors were weak who could not control the unrest and revolt in various parts of the empire. Consequently the north-western and southern portions were the first to go out. Some historians hold Ashoka responsible for this decline. Ashoka's pacifist policies weakened the empire in terms of wars and military strength. The centralised empire needs very strong willed rulers which was not the case with Ashoka's successors. Some historians think that Ashoka's welfare measures must have eaten away a large chunk of income and over all income must have been very inadequate to maintain the army and the administrative machinery. This must have weakened the entire edifice of the empire. But weak economy does not appear to be the case, as the excavations of Mauryan settlements and also other evidence point to an expending and flourishing economy.

Polity and Administration

The Mauryan empire was one of the largest in the whole of the ancient world. It ushered in a centralised form of government. From the *Arthashastra*, Ashokan inscriptions and from the fragments available from Megasthenese's accounts, we have a fairly good idea about the various aspects of administration, economy, society and religion of the people.

The king was head of the state. He had judicial, legislative and executive powers. The king issued what were known as *sasana* or ordinances. The

edicts of Ashoka are examples of those *sasanas*. But king could not do whatever he liked. He had to follow the law of the country given by law givers and had to govern according to the customs of the land. The king was assisted in administration by a Council of Ministers (*Mantriparishad*). Besides, there were some officers known as *Adhyakshas* (superintendents). Kautilya refers to a large number of superintendent like those of gold, store houses, commerce, agriculture, ships, cows, horses, elephants, chariots, infantry, passports, the city, etc.

In the Mauryan administration there was an officer called *yukta* who was perhaps the subordinate officer incharge of the revenues of the king. The *rajjukas* were officers responsible for land measurement and fixing their boundaries. They were also given power to punish the guilty and set free the innocents. Another officer of the Mauryan administration was *Pradeshikas*. Some scholars think that he was responsible for the collection of revenue while others think that he was the provincial governer.

The Mauryan empire was divided into provinces. We do not know about the number of provinces during the reign of Chandragupta and Bindusara. But we know that during the reign of Bindusara, Ashoka was posted at Ujjain as Governor of the Avanti region while his brother Susima was posted at Taxila as the Governor of the north-western provinces. The important provinces were directly under *Kumaras* (princes). According to the Junagarh rock inscription of Rudradaman, Saurashtra (Kathiawar) was governed by *vaisya* Pushyagupta at the time of Chandragupta Maurya and by *yavana-raja* Tushaspa at the time of Ashoka, both provincial governors.

Provinces were subdivided into the districts, each of these were further divided into groups of villages and the final unit of administration was the village. A group of officials worked in each district. The *pradeshika* was the head of district administration who toured the entire district every five years to inspect the administration of areas under his control. The *rajjuka* was responsible for surveying and assessing the land, fixing its rent and record keeping beside judicial functions enumerated above. The duties of *Yukta* largely comprised secretarial work, collection and accounting of revenue etc. There were an intermediate levels of administration between district and that of village. This unit comprised five to ten or more villages.

The village was the smallest unit of administration. The head of the village was called *gramika* who was assisted in village administration by "village elders". It is difficult to say whether the *gramika* was a paid servant, or was elected by the village people. The villages enjoyed considerable autonomy. Most of the disputes of the village were settled by *gramika* with the help of village assembly. The *Arthashastra* mentions a wide range of scales in salary, the highest being 48,000 *panas* and the lowest 60 *panas*.

City Administration

A number of cities such as Pataliputra, Taxila, Ujjain, Tosali, Suvarnagiri, Samapa, Isila, and Kausambi are mentioned in the edicts of Ashoka. The *Arthashashtra* has a full chapter on the administration of cities. Megasthenese has described in detail the administration of Pataliputra and it can be safely presumed that similar administrative system was followed in most of the Mauryan cities.

Megasthenese tells us that the city of Pataliputra was administered by a city council comprising 30 members. These thirty members were divided into a board of five members each. Each of these boards had specific responsibilities towards the administration of city. For example, first board was concerned with the industrial and artistic produce. Its duties included fixing of wages, check the adulteration etc. The second board dealt with the affairs of the visitors, especially foreigners who came to Pataliputra. The third board was concerned with the registration of birth and death. The fourth board regulated trade and commerce, kept a vigil on the manufactured goods and sales of commodities. The fifth board was responsible for the supervision of manufacture of goods. The sixth board collected taxes as per the value of sold goods. The tax was normally one-tenth of the sold goods.

The city council appointed officers who looked after the public welfare such as maintenance and repairs of roads, markets, hospitals, temples, educational institutions, sanitation, water supplies, harbors etc. The officer incharge of the city was known as *Nagaraka.*

The administrative machinery of the Mauryan state was fairly developed and well organised. Numerous departments regulated and controlled the activities of the state. Several important departments that Kautilya mentions are accounts, revenue, mines and minerals, chariots, customs and taxation. The state was conceived as a complex of activities of its various departments which covered almost every sphere of the state's affairs.

Society and Culture

Megasthenese speaks of Mauryan society as comprising seven castes – philosophers, farmers, soldiers, herdsmen, artisans, magistrates and councillors. Megasthenese could not properly comprehend the Indian society and failed to distinguish between *jati, varna* and the occupation. The *chaturvarna* system continued to govern the society. But the craftsmen, irrespective of *jati* enjoyed a high place in the society. The material growth mellowed the *jati* restrictions and gave people prosperity and respectibility. The urban way of life developed. The residential accommodation, its wealth etc. were entered into official records and rules and regulation were well defined and strictly implemented.

The Education was fairly wide spread. Teaching continued to be the main job of the brahmans. But Buddhist monasteries also acted as educational institutions. Taxila, Ujjayini

and Varanasi were famous educational centres. The technical education was generally provided through guilds, where pupils learnt the crafts from early age.

In the domestic life, the joint family system was the norm. A married woman had her own property in the form of bride-gift (*stree-dhana*), and jewels. These were at her disposal in case of widowhood. The widows had a very honourable place in the society. There are frequent references to women enjoying freedom and engaged in gainful occupation. Offences against women were severely dealt with. Kautilya laid down penalties against officials, in charge of workshops and prisons who misbehaved with women.

Megasthenese has stated that slavery did not exist in India. However, forced labour and bonded labour did exist on a very limited scale but were not treated so harshly as the slaves in the western world.

About one and a half century of Mauryan rule witnessed the growth of economy, art and architecture, education, etc. which made India into a great civilization and one of the greatest countries in the contemporary world.

Economy

The Mauryan state created a machinery which governed vast areas directly and to enforce the rules and regulations in respect of agriculture, industry, commerce, animal husbandry, etc. The measures taken by the Mauryan state for the promotion of the economy gave great impetus to economic development during the period. The vastness of India's agricultural and mineral resources and the extraordinary skill of her craftsmen have been mentioned with admiration by Megasthenese and other Greek writers.

The large part of the population was agriculturists and lived in villages. New areas were brought under cultivation after cleaning the forest. The state helped people in this endeavour. Certain types of forests were protected by law. People were encouraged to settle down in new areas. Among the crops, rice of different varieties, coarse grains (*kodrava*), sesame, pepper and saffron, pulses, wheat, linseed, mustard, vegetable and fruits of various kinds and sugarcane were grown. The state also owned agricultural farms, cattle farms, dairy farms etc. Irrigation was given due importance. Water reservoirs and dams were built and water for irrigation was distributed and measured. The famous inscription of Rudradaman found at Junagarh mentions that one of Chandragupta's governors, Pushyagupta, was responsible for building a dam on Sudarshana lake near Girnar in Kathiawad. From an inscription of Skandagupta we came to know that this very dam was repaired during his reign, almost 800 years after it was built.

Industry was organised in various guilds. The chief industries were textile, mining and metallurgy, ship building, jewellery making, metal working, pot making etc. Some other

industries were, manufacturing dyes, gums, drugs, perfumes, etc. The trade was regulated by the state. India supplied the western countries with indigo, various medicinal substances, cotton and silk. Foreign trade was carried on by land as well as by sea. Special arrangements were made for the protection of trade-routes. Provisions of warehouses, godowns and transport arrangements were also made. The trader had to get a license to trade. The state controlled and regulated the weights and measures. The artisans and craftsmen were specially protected by the state and offences against them were severely punished.

The guilds were powerful institutions. It gave craftsmen great economic, political and judicial powers and protection. The chief of a guild was called *Jesthaka*. The guilds settled the disputes of their members. A few guilds issued their own coins. The guilds also made donations to educational institutions, learned brahmans and to the destitute. This can be understood by later inscriptional evidences. The Sanchi stupa inscription mentions that one of the carved gateways was donated by the guilds of ivory workers. Similarly, the Nasik cave inscription mentions that two weaver's guilds gave permanent endowments for the maintenance of a temple.

Kautilya says, "A full treasury is a guarantee of the prosperity of the state" and it is the most important duty of the king to keep the treasury full at all the times for all works. During the Mauryan period, taxes were levied both in cash and in kind and were collected by local officers. The chief source of revenue was land tax and the tax levied on trade etc. The land tax was one-

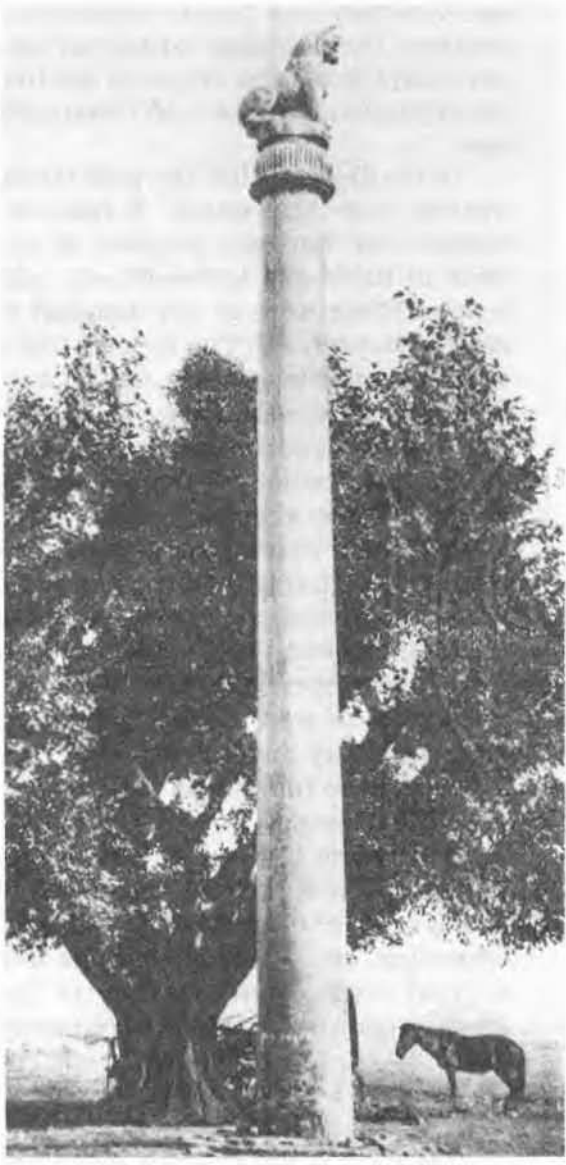


Fig. 14.4 *Ashokan Pillar with Lion Capital at Lauriya Nandangarh*

fourth to one-sixth of the produce. Toll tax was levied on all items which were brought for sale in the market. Tax was also levied on all manufactured goods. Those who could not pay the tax in cash or kind were to contribute their dues in the form of labour. Strabo mentions that craftsmen, herdsmen, traders, farmers, all paid taxes. The *Arthashashtra* describes revenue at great length. This was further augmented by income from mines, forests, pasture lands, trade, forts etc. The income from the king's own land or estate was known as *sita*.

Brahmans, children, and handicapped people were exempted from paying taxes. Also no tax was levied in areas where new trade routes or new irrigation projects or new agricultural land were being developed. Tax evasion was considered a very serious crime and offenders were severely punished.

Art and Architecture

During the Mauryan period we notice a great development in the field of art and architecture. The main examples of the Mauryan art and architecture that have survived are:

(i) Remains of the royal palace and the city of Pataliputra

(ii) Ashokan pillars and capitals

(iii) Rock cut Chaitya caves in the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills

(iv) Individual Mauryan sculptures and terracotta figurines

The famous city of Pataliputra (modern Patna) was described in detail by Megasthenese, reference of which are found in the writings of Strabo, Arrian and other Greek Writers. It stretched along the river Ganga in the form of a parallelogram. It was enclosed by a wooden wall and had 64 gates. Excavations have brought to light remains of palaces and the wooden palisade. Arrian described the palace in these terms, "where the greatest of all kings" of India resided, "was a marvel of workmanship with which neither Memnomian Susa with all its costly splendour, nor Ekbatana with all its magnificence, can vie". The Mauryan wooden palace survived for about 700 years because, at the end of the fourth century A.D. when Fa-Hien saw it, it was astounding. The palace and also the wooden palisade seems to have been destroyed by fire. The burnt wooden structure and ashes have been found from Kumrahar.

Seven rock-cut caves in the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills show that the

Fig. 14.5 *The Barabar Cave*

considered to be one of the most unique historical record. It gives a biographical account of the king's life and his achievements, not in general terms but year-wise. The inscription, for example, says that after having received his training in writing, mathematics, law and finance, necessary for a crown-prince, Kharvela ascended the throne in his twenty fourth year. He spent the first year in rebuilding the capital of Kalinga. In the second year, he defied the might of Satakarni and attacked and destroyed the city of Mushika; in the fourth year he subduded Rathiras and Bhojakas of Berar. In the fifth year he extended the old canal which was built by the Nandas about 300 years earlier and had fallen in disuse. Kharavela invaded the kingdom of Magadha in the eighth and twelfth years of his reign. During the second campaign, Kharavela carried home an image of the Jain tirthankara from Magadha which had been previously taken away from Kalinga to Magadha. The wealth he got during this campaign was used to built a magnificent temple at Bhubaneswar. In the thirteenth year of his reign he undertook many public welfare schemes and also subduded the Pandya rulers.

The inscription mentions the achievements only upto the thirteenth year of Kharavela's reign. Nothing is heard of him or his successors, if any.

Some *Ganasanghas*

Apart from some important dynasties ruling in post-Mauryan north India we have a number of republics ruling over

Fig. 15.1 *Tribal Coins*

smaller states. We know about these republics through their coins on which their names are found. Some of these were Arjunayanas, Malavas, Audumbaras, Kunindas, Yaudheyas etc. Most of these, later on became tributaries of the Guptas and vanished altogether after the fourth century A.D.

Satavahanas of Deccan

Before the emergence of the Satavahanas in Maharashtra and Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas in southern India the region was settled by megalithic people.

While northern India was reeling under turmoil after the fall of Mauryas a very powerful kingdom was established by the Satavahanas, also known as Andhras, in Deccan covering parts of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The Andhras are an ancient people and are mentioned in the *Aitareya Brahmana* also. The Greek

writer Pliny mentions that the Andhras were powerful people who possessed a large number of villages and thirty towns, an army of one lakh infantry, two thousand cavalry and one thousand elephants. During the Mauryan age they were part of the Mauryan empire but it appears that immediately after the fall of the dynasty, the Andhras declared themselves free.

The founder of this dynasty is known as Simuka and he ruled from

Fig. 15.2 *Coins of Satavahanas*

235 B.C. to 213 B.C. He was succeeded by his brother Krishna. The third king was Satakarni I who seems to have made extensive conquests and performed two *Ashvamedhayajna*. His achievements are described in detail in the Nanaghat inscription. It appears that he conquered western Malwa, Vidarbha and Anupa (Narmada Valley). He is also referred to as the lord of Dakshinapatha. His name also occurs on one of the gateways of Sanchi stupa. It is well known that substantial donations were made by the Satavahanas for the renovation and decoration of Sanchi stupas and monasteries.

The next important king was Gautamiputra Satakarni. In between, three kings ruled, of whom Satakarni II ruled for about 56 years. He wrested Malwa from the Sungas. After Satakarni II, the expansion of Satavahana empire received a set back and Nahapana seems to have conquered part of Satavahana territory. A large number of coins of Nahapana has been found in Nasik area.

The Satavahanas became powerful again during the reign of Gautamiputra Satakarni. His achievements are recorded in glowing terms in the Nasik inscription of Queen-mother, Gautami Balasri. This inscription was engraved after his death and in the nineteenth year of the reign of his son and successor Pulmavi II. In this inscription he has been described as one who destroyed the Sakas, Yavanas and Pahlavas. He overthrew Nahapana and restruct large number of his silver coins. He also recovered northern Maharasthra, Konkan, Vidarbha, Saurashtra and Malwa from the Sakas. Satakarni dedicated a cave in Nasik in the eighteenth year of his reign and granted some land to ascetics in the twenty fourth year. Gautamiputra Satakarni is the first king bearing matronym and this practice was followed by nearly all his successors.

Gautamiputra was succeeded by his son Vasisthiputra Sri Pulmavi in about A.D. 130 and ruled for about twenty four years. The coins and inscription of Pulmavi have been found in Andhra Pradesh. This shows that Andhra had become a part of Satavahana empire in the second century A.D. Perhaps in order to save the Satavahana empire from the onslaught of the Sakas, Pulmavi married the daughter of Saka ruler Rudradaman. But this Saka king defeated the next Satavahana ruler twice and took from him Aparant (Konkan) and Anupa (Narmada valley).

Sri Yajna Satakarni (A.D. 165-195) was perhaps the last of the great Satavahana rulers. His inscriptions have been found in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. From the distribution of his coins it appears that he ruled over a large kingdom extending from bay of Bengal in east to Arabian sea in the west. Thus he regained the land that the Sakas had conquered from his predecessors. Maritime trade and activities during his reign are indicated by depiction of ship with a fish and conch on his coins.

The successors of Yajna were weak and unworthy to govern such a large empire. They ruled over small territories. The Satavahana empire collapsed when Abhiras seized Maharashtra and Ikshvakus and Pallavas appropriated the eastern provinces.

The Epoch of Foreign Invaders

One of the most important events of the reign of Pushyamitra Sunga was the invasion of Yavanas from the west. Patanjali, a contemporary of Pushyamitra, mentions this invasion. Kalidasa also mentions about Vasumitra's conflict with Yavanas, in his *Malavikagnimitram*. It may be mentioned that the word Yavana originally meant Ionian Greeks, but later it came to denote, all people of Greek nationality. The Yavanas were the first ones to establish foreign supremacy on Indian soil; they were succeeded by several central Asian tribes who invaded India and established their political authority. Some of them are being discussed here.

The Indo-Greeks

The advent of the Yavanas, also known as Indo-Greeks, in India was the result of incidents on the western border of India. After Alexander a large part of his empire came under the rule of his Generals. The two main areas were Bactria and the adjoining areas of Iran known as Parthia. About 250 B.C. Diodotus, the governor of Bactria revolted against the Greeks and proclaimed his independence. Some important Indo-Greek kings were Euthydemus, Demetrius, Eucratides and Menander.

Among all the Indo-Greek rulers, Menander (165-145 B.C.), was the most illustrious. He ruled for almost twenty years. His capital was Sakala (modern Sialkot) in Pakistan. Greek writers tell us that he was a great ruler and his territory extended from Afghanistan to Uttar Pradesh in east and Gujarat in the west. Menander was converted to

Fig. 15.3 *Coins of Indo-Greeks*

Buddhism by Buddhist monk Nagasena. Menander asked Nagasena many questions related to philosophy and Buddhism, which together with Nagasena's answers are recorded in *Milindapanho* or the *Questions of Milinda.*

In the history of India, the Indo-Greek rulers are the first ones whose coins carried the portraits of kings and their names. Before this, the coins in India did not carry names or portraits of the kings. Also they were the first rulers who issued gold coins. The Indo-Greek coins are known for the depiction of realistic and artistic portraits.

The Parthians

The Parthians also known as Pahlavas were Iranian people. Their history is obscure. But a few facts may be gleaned from coins and inscriptions. The earliest king of this dynasty was Vonones, who captured power in Arachosia and Seistan and adopted the title of "great king of kings". Vonones was succeeded by Spalirises. Gondophernes was the greatest of the Parthian rulers. He ruled from A.D. 19 - 45. It appears that for a very brief period he was master of the Saka-Pahalva area both in eastern Iran and north-western India. Soon after Gondophernes, the Pahlava rule in India ended and the Kushanas moved in. Excavations at Begram in Afghanistan have brought to light a large number of coins of Gondophernes but none of his successors.

The Sakas

The Indo-Greek rule in north-western India was destroyed by the Sakas who are also known as the Scythians. The Sakas or Scythians were nomadic tribes who belonged to central Asia. In about 165 B.C. they were turned out of their original home by the Yueh-chi, later came to be known as Kushanas, who in turn were also pushed out of their land and came to India. The in-roads made by the central Asian tribes was the result of the prevailing situations in central Asia and adjoining north-western China. After the construction of the great wall of China in the third century B.C. the tribes like Hiung-nu, Wu-sun and Yueh-chi had no option but to move towards south and west. The first migrants were Yueh-chi, who displaced Sakas, who in turn, invaded Bactria and Parthia and then entered India through the Bolan Pass. The Sakas were divided in five branches and established themselves in various parts of north-western and northern India. One branch settled in Afghanistan. The second branch settled in Punjab with

Taxila as its capital. The third branch settled in Mathura. The fourth in Maharashtra and Saurashtra and the fifth in central India with Ujjain as its capital. The Sakas ruled in different areas from the first century B.C. to about fourth century A.D.

Although the Sakas ruled in different parts of the country, only those who ruled in central and western India rose to prominence. The most prominent ruler of western India was Nahapana whose reference is found in various inscriptions found in Maharashtra and in the records of the Satavahanas. Of the central Indian branch, the most illustrious ruler was Rudradaman who ruled from about A.D. 130-150. From the Junagarh rock inscription of Rudradaman, it appears that his rule extended over a vast territory including the areas of Gujarat, Sindh, Saurashtra, north Konkan, Malwa and parts of Rajasthan. He undertook the repairs of the Sudarsan lake dam that had been built by the provincial governer Chandragupta Maurya, in Kathiawad when it was damaged by heavy rains.

Ujjayini, the capital of Rudradaman became a centre of culture and education. Many scholars think that Saka Era was founded by Sakas. The dynasty came to an end with the defeat of the last king in the hands of Chandragupta II of the Gupta dynasty, in about A.D. 390.

The Kushanas

The Chinese historians tell us that the Yueh-chi were a nomadic tribe settled on north-western border of China. In the year 165 B.C., they came in conflict with a neighbouring tribe known as Hiung-nu. The Yueh-chi were defeated and forced to move out of their land. They could not move towards the east, since the China Wall had become a barrier. They had no alternative but to move west and south. While moving westwards the Yueh-chi came in conflict with another tribe called Wu-sun whom they defeated easily. At about this time the Yueh-chi were divided into two groups – Little Yueh-chi which migrated to Tibet and great Yueh-chi which finally came to India. After Wu-sun the next people, the Yueh-chi, met were the Sakas who occupied the territory of Bactria. The Saka's were forced to leave their land and they came to India and the Yueh-chi settled down in the land of the Sakas. It is here that they gave up their nomadic life and adopted an agricultural and a settled way of life. Further, perhaps its in this area great Yueh-chi were divided into five branches.

According to Chinese sources, the first great Yueh-chi king was Kujula Kadphises, also known as Kadphises I who united all the five groups and established his authority over Afghanistan. He called himself 'great king'. He is also called *dharmathida* and *sachadharmathida* (steadfast in true faith), which is taken to suggest that he was a Buddhist.

Kadphises I was succeeded by his son Wema Kadphises or Kadphises II who extended Kushana territory upto Punjab, or perhaps even in the Ganga-

Fig. 15.4 *Coins of Kushana*

Fig. 15.5 *Statue of Kanishka*

Yamuna doab. He issued gold and copper coins and is referred to as great king and a devotee of Siva. On some of his coins Siva holding a trident and bull are shown.

Kadphises II was succeeded by Kanishka, the most well known and greatest of all the Kushana kings. Kanishka seems to have come to throne in A.D. 78 and some historians think that Kanishka founded the *Saka era*. At its peak, Kanishka's empire extended from Khotan in the north-west to Benaras in the east and Kashmir in north to Saurashtra and Malwa in the south. The capital of this vast empire of Kanishka was Purushapur i.e. modern Peshawar. Coins of Kanishka had been found from almost all over the above mentioned area.

Kanishka was a follower of Buddhism. The fourth Buddhist council was held during Kanishka's reign. Kanishka's court was adorned by the presence of such scholars as Parsva, Vasumitra, Ashvaghosha, Charaka, and Nagarjuna. During his reign Taxila and Mathura emerged as great centres of art and culture.

Kaniskha ruled from A.D. 78-101. After him came Vasishka, Huvishka, Vasudeva and others. The last name is purely Indian and suggests the complete Indianisation of Kushana. Though his name is after the *Vaishnava* deity, he was a *Saiva*. The decline of Kushana power set in after Vasishka, though the Kushanas continued to rule up to the fourth century A.D. over small principalities, independently under some sovereign rulers.

Exercises

1. Describe the political condition of India after Mauryans.
2. Who were the Satavahanas? Describe their political achievements.
3. Who were Indo-Greek and how do we know about them?
4. Who were Kushanas? Describe their political history.
5. Write short notes on:
   (i) Sakas
   (ii) Kanishka
   (iii) Parthians
   (iv) Kharvela

Things to Do

- Collect some pictures of the coins found in different dynasties. Try and find out their value in terms of Rupees.

Chapter 16

The Early History of South India

The earliest references that we find about the people and kingdoms of the area are preserved in three forms — Ashokan inscriptions, Sangam literature and Megasthenese's accounts. The Rock Edict II and XIII of Ashoka mentions the southern kingdoms of Chola, Pandya, Satyaputra, Keralaputra and Tambapanni.

WE have seen in an earlier chapter that southern India, mainly the present states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, were inhabitated by megalithic people in the first millennium B.C. In this chapter we shall learn about the history of south India from the Megalithic period to about A.D. 300.

The Megalithic Phase in South India

The megalithic culture is mostly known for its burials, which have been generically termed megaliths (lit. = big stones), even when the big stones are not associated. These burials are marked by an abundance of iron tools and a Black-and-Red pottery. It appears that there was an abrupt change from the Neolithic stage into the Iron Age, without any significant, intermediate Chalcolithic or Bronze Age. The following are the main Megalithic burial types.

(i) *Pit Circle graves:* The body was first excarnated and then interred. Grave goods included pots and iron artifacts. A stone circle is erected around the pit.

(ii) *Cists:* These graves have a variety of forms. Cists are made out of granite slabs with one or more capstones, with or without port holes. Cists are fully buried, half buried, or even on the bare rocks. They may contain single or multiple burials. A single or multiple stone circle surrounds the cists.

(iii) *Laterite chambers:* In Malabar, instead of granite slabs, there are grave-chambers excavated into laterite.

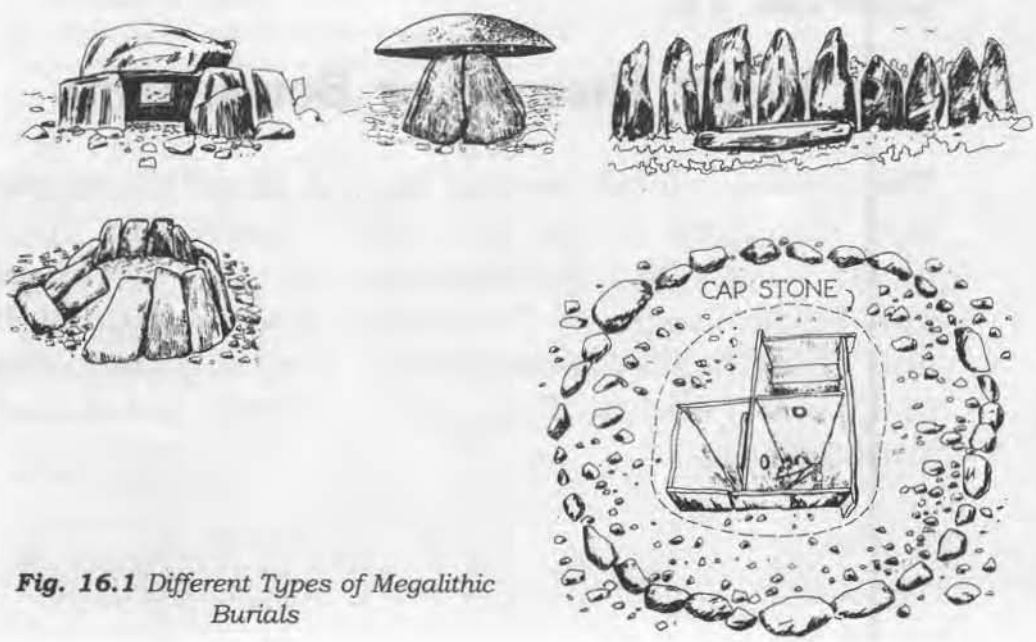


Fig. 16.1 *Different Types of Megalithic Burials*

(iv) *Alignments:* In Gulbarga district and south of Hyderabad, a large number of standing stones (menhirs) arranged in squares or diagonals have been found, their height ranging from 2 to 6 m. In Kashmir, menhirs are however arranged in a semi-circle.

(v) *Sacrophagi:* These legged urns of terracotta sometimes have animal heads and are not very common.

(vi) *Urns:* The practice of burying excarnated bones in urns seems to be a hangover from the Neolithic past. They are marked by capstones or stone circles. Their main concentration is on the eastern coast.

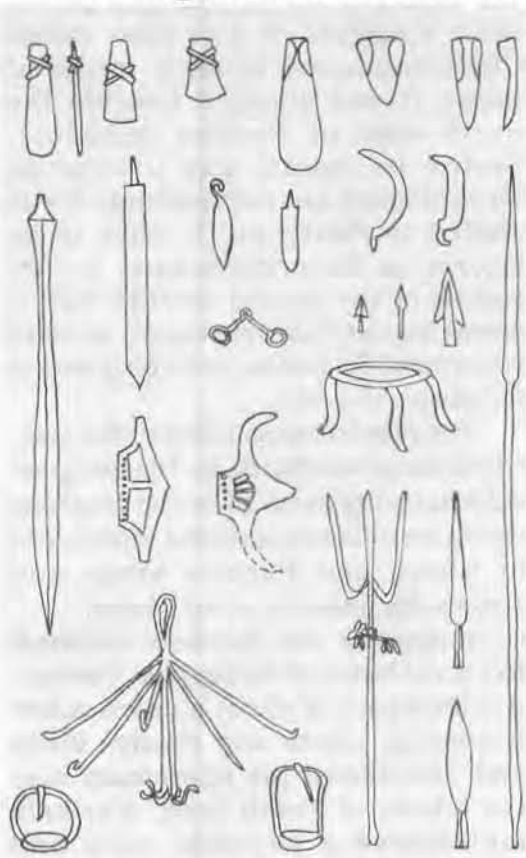


Fig. 16.2 *Megalithic Iron Tools*

There is no doubt about the variety in Megalithic construction, but the common denominator is provided by a Black-and-Red ware and typical iron tools. They have a surprising uniformity all over the peninsula. In the pottery shapes conical or looped lids, carinated vases, pedestalled bowls, spouted dishes etc. are quite characteristic. Of the iron implements the main types are axes with crossed straps, sickles, tripods, tridents, spearheads, swords, lamp hangers, arrowheads and lamps. Horse-harness bits and bells are also common finds. Occasionally, beads of etched carnelian, gold ornaments and sundry objects of copper or stone are associated with the megaliths.

These Megalithic monuments, whatever their external shape and contents, seem in our present knowledge to herald not only the Iron Age, that is a period of India's history when the use of iron for tools and weapons became common, but also a time when dated literature begins to be available. Thus, in a sense with Megaliths, prehistory ends and history begins. Though this is largely true, we still know very little as how the Megalithic people lived, because no such site has been excavated. Naturally, the builders of these Megaliths remain unknown. No reference to these monuments has been traced in Sanskrit or Prakrit literature, though the early Tamil literature does contain descriptions of these burial practices.

The Early History

The earliest references that we find about the people and kingdoms of the area are preserved in three forms — Ashokan inscriptions, Sangam literature and Megasthenese's accounts. The Rock Edict II and XIII of Ashoka mentions the southern kingdoms of Chola, Pandya, Satyaputra, Keralaputra and Tambapanni. All these lay outside the Ashokan empire but Ashoka's benevolence to these neighbouring states is very much attested by the fact that he made provisions for medicines and food items etc. for animals and humans of these kingdoms. Megasthenese also mentions these states. In the Hathigumpha inscription of Kharvela, he is credited for defeating a confederacy of Tamil states.

The first detailed description of south Indian states is found in Sangam literature belonging to the first four centuries of the Christian era. It may be mentioned that Tamil is the oldest among the spoken and literary languages of south India and the earliest literature of this language is known as Sangam literature. This literature represents the collection of odes, lyrics and idylls which were composed by poets and scholars for the presentation in three successive literary assemblies called "*Sangam*", established by the Pandyan kings. The Sangam literature preserves folk memory about the society and life in south India between the third Century B.C. and third Century A.D.

From the Ashokan inscriptions, Meganthenese's accounts, Sanskrit and Sangam literature, it is clear that there has been a lot of cultural interactions between the southern and northern India. With the regular settled life, development of strong sedentary communities and a strong economy, three states, namely, Cholas, Cheras and Pandya emerged. The Sangam literature believes that the dynasties of Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas belong to immemorial antiquity.

Cholas

The Cholas occupied the delta of the Kaveri river and the adjoining region. The region of Kanchi was also part of their kingdom. It was also called Cholamandalam in early medieval times. It was situated towards the north-east of Pandya kingdom. Earlier its capital was Uraiyur in Tiruchirapalli but subsequently it was shifted to Puhar which came to be known as Kaveripattanam. In the middle of the second century B.C. it seems that a Chola king known as Elara conquered Sri Lanka and ruled over it for about 50 years.

The most distinguished of the early Chola kings was Karikala. His two great achievements seem to be the crushing defeat he inflicted upon the joint forces of Chera and Pandya kings and successful invasion of Sri Lanka.

It appears that Karikala defeated, in a great battle at Venni, near Tanjore, a confederacy of about a dozen rulers headed by Chera and Pandya kings and established his supremacy over the whole of Tamil land. Karikala maintained a powerful navy and conquered Sri Lanka. He is credited to have built big irrigation channels by

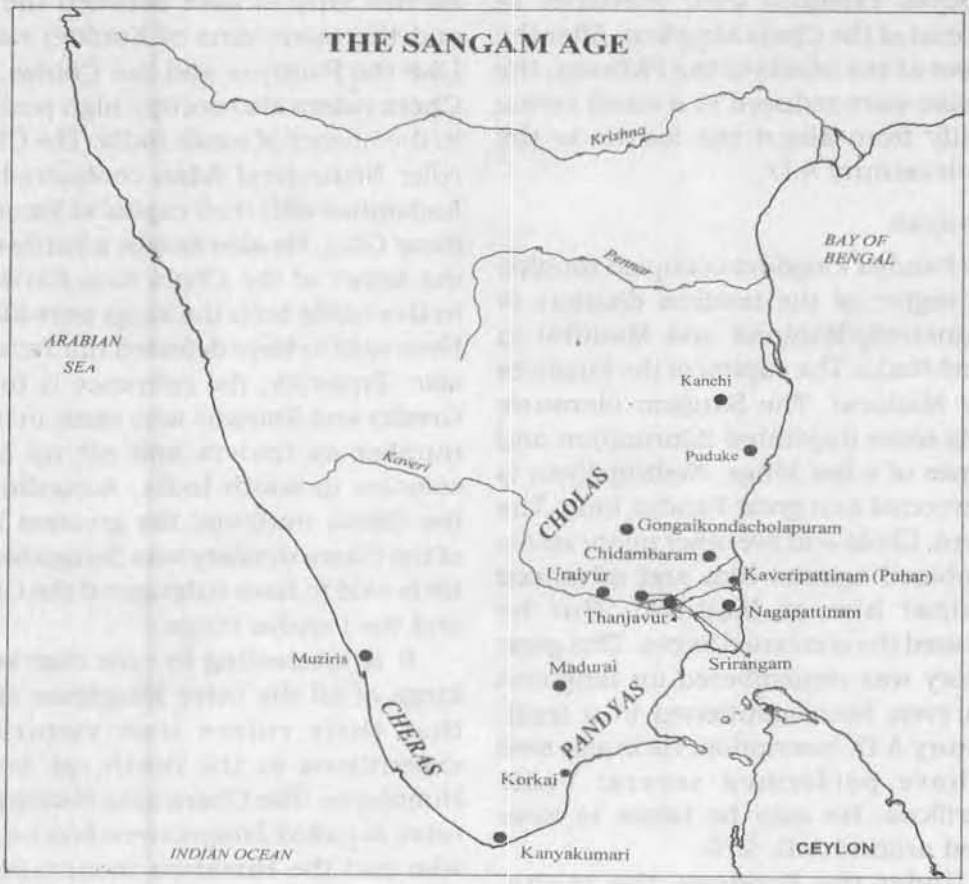


Fig. 16.3 *Sangam Age*

means of building a 160 km. long embankment along the river Kaveri. He fortified the town, the famous sea part of Puhar, at the mouth of the Kaveri. These two great works were chiefly done by 12,000 people brought as prisoners of war from Sri Lanka. All this lead to the growth of agriculture, trade, commerce, arts and craft etc. He was a great patron of literature and education. He was a follower of Vedic religion and performed many Vedic sacrifices.

After Karikala, the Chola kingdom faced confusion and chaos. The successors were quite weak and family members squabbled for power and position. The only other king, after Karikala, who is known as a great king is Illanjetcenni who captured two fortresses from the Cheras. But the fact remains that after Karikala, the Chola

empire declined and the Cheras and Pandyas extended their territories at the cost of the Chola kingdom. After the defeat at the hands of the Pallavas, the Cholas were reduced to a small ruling family from about the fourth to the ninth century A.D.

Pandyas

The Pandya kingdom occupied roughly the region of the modern districts of Tirunelveli, Ramnad and Madurai in Tamil Nadu. The capital of the kingdom was Madurai. The Sangam literature gives some disjointed information and names of a few kings. Nedunjeliyan is mentioned as a great Pandya king. The Chera, Chola and five other minor states combined against him and advanced against him at Madurai. But he defeated the combined forces. This great victory was remembered for long and has even been mentioned in a tenth century A.D. inscription. He is also said to have performed several Vedic sacrifices. He may be taken to have ruled around A.D. 210.

Under the Pandyas, the capital Madurai and port city Korkai were great centres of trade and commerce. The Pandyan kingdom was very wealthy and prosperous. The traders profited from trade with the Roman empire. Pandya kings even sent embassies to the Roman emperor Augustus and Trojan.

Cheras

The Cheras, also known as Keralaputras, were situated to the west and north of the Pandya kingdom. The area of the kingdom included the narrow strip of land between the sea and the mountains of Konkan range. Like the Pandyas and the Cholas, the Chera rulers also occupy high position in the history of south India. The Chera ruler Nedunjeral Adan conquered the Kadambas with their capital at Vanavasi (near Goa). He also fought a battle with the father of the Chola king Karikala. In this battle both the kings were killed. He is said to have defeated the Yavanas also. Probably, the reference is to the Greeks and Romans who came in large number as traders and set up large colonies in south India. According to the Chera tradition, the greatest king of the Chera dynasty was Sengutturan. He is said to have subjugated the Chola and the Pandya kings.

It is interesting to note that some kings of all the three kingdoms claim that their rulers lead victorious expeditions to the north, as far as Himalayas. The Chera king Nedunjeral Adan is called *Imayavaramban* i.e. "he who had the Himalaya mountains as the boundary of his kingdom". But clearly all this was exaggeration. At the end of the third century A.D. the Chera power declined and we hear about them again in the eighth century A.D.

However, one important fact about these three early kingdoms of south India is that they constantly fought with each other and made new alliances against the ones who became powerful, irrespective of past friendship and alliances. They also fought regularly with Sri Lanka.

Exercises

1. Discuss the Megalithic culture in south India.
2. Describe the economy of the Megalithic people.
3. Describe the political history of Cheras, Pandyas and Cholas.

Things to Do

- Collect photographs of the Megalithic burials and tools and show it in the classroom.
- Draw the map of India and show the locations of the kingdom of Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras.

Chapter 17

Society, Economy and Culture During the Sungas and the Satavahanas

The five centuries that passed between the fall of the Mauryas and the rise of the Guptas witnessed a lot of political instability and upheaval, but during the same period there had been a lot of progress in the areas of literature, science, art, architecture, etc.

The five centuries that passed between the fall of the Mauryas and the rise of the Guptas witnessed a lot of political instability and upheaval, but during the same period there had been a lot of progress in the areas of literature, science, art, architecture, etc. Many new avenues in the field of the sciences and arts were opened which provided the base for future developments. Also, during this period, there were close cultural and economic relations with foreign countries. India had benefited by these foreign contacts.

Language and Literature

In the field of language and literature this period is characterised by the development of manifold literary activities both in north and south India. It saw the development of Dravidian languages and literature in the South. In the north there was progress in the Sanskrit language and literature, and various forms of Prakrit with a distinctive literature of its own.

The most remarkable compilations of the period are the two great Epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Some of the *Dharmasastra* works were also composed in this period.

The *smritis* have played a very important role in Hindu life during the last two thousand years. These *smritis* define the religious duties, usage, laws and social customs. In general, the *smritis* may be regarded as the expanded and contemporary version of the *Dharmasutras* which covered the period from about sixth century to third century B.C. The works on the *smritis* follow almost immediately afterwards and continues for almost eight hundred years or even more.

The *Manava Dharmasastra* or *Manusmriti* is not only the oldest work of this class, but is also the most well known and has its hold even today all over India. This was composed in about the first century B.C. Some other important *smritis* are *Naradasmriti, Vishnusmriti, Yajnavalkyasmriti, Brihaspatismriti* and *Katyayanasmriti*. They are all very important sources of law and social customs of the contemporary society. These *smritis* were declared to be of divine origin.

The most outstanding work in the field of grammar, *Mahabhasya* written by Patanjali in the second century B.C., is a commentary on Panini's *Asthadhyayi*. After Patanjali, the centre of Sanskrit grammar learning shifted to the Deccan where the Katantra school flourished in the first century A.D. Sarvavarman, a scholar of great repute in the court of the Satavahana King Hala, composed the grammar of Katantra. This work was short and handy which helped the learning of Sanskrit in about six months. Hala wrote a great poetical work *Gathasaptasati* in Prakrit.

An important literary figure of the period was Asvaghosha. He was not only a play writer and a poet but a great Buddhist philosopher. He wrote *Saundarananda, Buddhacharita, Vajrasuchi* and a number of other works. *Buddhacharita* is a complete life of Buddha written in the form of *Mahakavya*. This work has been

translated into many languages of the world. Fragments of Asvaghosha's plays have been recovered from Turfan, in central Asia. Bhasa's *Svapna-vasavadatta* is another famous Sanskrit play of the period.

The art of dance and drama had already been codified by Panini's time and mentioned by Kautilya and Patanjali. All these early forms of art contributed to the development of *Natyashastra* written by Bharata.

The important Pali work of the period was *Milindapanho,* which explains the Buddhist doctrines in the form of a dialogue between Milinda (who is generally identified with the Indo-Greek king Menander) and his teacher, the great Buddhist philosopher, Nagasena.

Sangam Literature

Tamil is the oldest among spoken literary languages of south India. The earliest known phase of this literature is associated with the three Sangams i.e., academies or societies of learned men, all of which flourished in the Pandya kingdom. Each Sangam consisted of a number of distinguished poets and erudite scholars who selected the best ones from amongst the works submitted to them and set their seal of approval.

It is believed that the Sangam literature produced by these assemblies, was compiled between A.D. 300 and 600. On the whole corpus of literature, *Ettuttogai* (the eight anthologies) collection is considered to be the earliest one belonging to *c.* third century B.C. to third century A.D., and a good deal of literature was compiled later on.

Tirukkural or *Kural,* of Tiruvalluvar is the best of the minor didactic poems, and its teachings have been described as an eternal inspiration and guide to the Tamilians. *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekhalali* are the two Tamil epics which occupy a high place in Tamil literature and are important sources for the construction of the early history of south India.

Social Conditions

During this period varna and *ashrama* systems continued to govern the society. Society comprised four varnas i.e., Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. The duties, status, and occupations of these varnas are enumerated in the *Dharmasastras.* The most significant development in the varna system is the increase in the number of mixed *jatis.* According to *Manusmriti* the origin of the numerous mixed (*sankara*) varnas is in the marriage between different varnas. These were called *anuloma* i.e., marriage between the male of higher varna and female of lower varna, or *pratiloma* – marriage between male of lower varna and female of higher varna. The social status of a person born of *anuloma* was higher than *partiloma* and they followed their father's occupation. Buddhist texts and other evidence also leave no doubt that the so called mixed castes really resulted from organisations like guilds of people

following different arts and crafts. The general theory of intermarriages leading to the birth of different mixed *jatis* appears superficial and handy. The Buddhist texts also show that *jatis* was not rigidly tied to craft in those days. They tell of a kshatriya working successively as a potter, basket-maker, reed-worker, garland-maker, and cook, also of a Setthi (Vaisya) working as a tailor and a potter, without loss of prestige in both cases. We find kshatriyas of the Sakya and Koliya clans cultivating their fields. The *Vasettha Sutta* refers to brahmans working as cultivators, craftsmen, messengers, sacrificers and landlords. The fragment on *Silas* mentions brahmans following many diverse occupations as physicians, sorcerers, architects, story-tellers, cattle-breeders, farmers and the like. The *Jatakas* refer to brahmans pursuing tillage, tending cattle, trade, hunting, carpentry, weaving, policing of caravans, archery, driving of carriages, and even snake-charming. The *Jatakas* hold up a brahman peasant as a supremely pious man and even a Bodhisattva.

One of the most important development of this period was the gradual absorption of foreigners like Indo-Greek, Sakas, Yavanas, Kushanas, Parthians etc. into Indian society. These foreigners came to India as conquerors but adopted Indian culture and way of life so completely that no trace was left of their individuality or separate existence as a community.

Ashramas : Just as society comprised four varnas, so too the life of an individual was divided into four stages. It may be pointed out that this four fold division of life dates back to the vedic age and we get a fairly comprehensive account of it in the *Dharmasutras*. These four stages of an individual life are:

(i) *Brahmacharya* : In this *ashrama*, after the investiture with the sacred thread, a person lead a celibate life as a student at the home of his teacher.

(ii) *Grihastha* : Having mastered the *Vedas* or part of them, a person returns to his parental home, gets married and becomes a householder (*grihastha*). *Grihastha* has manifold duties broadly marked out as (i) *yajna* (ii) *adhyayana*, and (iii) *dana* and has to release himself from three debts: debt to Gods, by *yajna;* to *pitris* (ancestors) by offsprings; and to rishis (teachers) by continuing learning and leading a religious life.

(iii) *Vanaprastha* : When well advanced in middle age and a person has seen his grandchildren, he leaves home for the forest to become a hermit. As a hermit he must not have any possessions, abstain from movement in rains, going from village to village for the exclusive purpose of begging, wearing only loin-cloth or old rags duly washed, to cover nakedness, not staying in the same village for the second night and not destroying seeds for the purposes of food (e.g. by pounding rice by a pestle) but depending on cooked food if given as alms.

(iv) *Sanyas* : In *sanyas* by meditation and penance one frees his soul from

material things, leaves hermitage and becomes a homeless wanderer, and thus earthly ties are broken. This fourth *ashrama* is the one when person abandons, truth and falsehood, pleasure and pain, the *vedas*, this world and the next, seeks only *atman*.

The scheme of the four *ashramas* was designed to give a wide scope to individuals in the choice of a vocation in life which was best suited to their intellectual capacity and mental inclinations. It was not absolutely necessary that one should strictly follow the four stages one after another. The choice was left to every individual. The family included parents, children, grandchildren, uncles and their descendents, servants etc.

Family Life

The joint family system characterised the society. Family rather than the individual was considered as the unit of the social system. Obedience to parents and elders was held as the highest duty for children. Marriage between the members of the same *jatis* was also preferred, though intermarriage between different *jatis* was prevalent. The marriage in the same *gotra* and *pravara* is restricted. Eight forms of marriage are mentioned in the *Dharmasastras*. These are—*brahma, daiva, arsha, prajapatya, asura, gandharva, rakshasa,* and *paisacha*. Among these the last one is condemned by all the *Dharmasatras*. Women not only got good education but also held honourable position in the society and household. Two classes of women students are mentioned –*Brahmavadin* or lifelong students of sacred texts and *Sadyodvaha* who pursued their studies till their marriage. They also received training in fine arts like music, dancing and painting. From the description of Megasthenese and Kautilya it appears that some of them went for military and administrative trainings also. The ideal marriages were those where the father and guardian of the girls selected the bridegroom on account of his qualifications. The women enjoyed honourable place in the society. Sometimes they reached high eminence in various branches of arts and science and administration as revealed from the literature of the period. Even the class of courtesans enjoyed a social status not accorded to them anywhere else in the world. The theme of several dramas of the period revolved around courtesans. We find the reference to the practice of *sati* also. In the family property, all the sons had equal share. Unfortunately, a large number of *Dharmasastras* reject the right of women to inherit, but *Yajnavalkya* lays down a list of priority in inheritance, which places wife, followed by the daughters, immediately after sons. The right of a wife to inherit, if no sons were living, has been accepted by most of the ancient Indian authorities. However, she was allowed some personal property (*stree-dhana*) in the form of jewellery, clothing etc. The *Arthashastra* allows her to own money upto 2,000 silver *panas*, and amount above this could be held by her husband in trust on her behalf.

Religions

The period witnessed an efflorescence of new ideas leading to the rise of new philosophical schools and religious sects, which modified the outlook of society and are visible in all four major religious sects of the period i.e., Vaishnavism, Saivism, Buddhism and Jainism.

Buddhism

During the reign of Ashoka, Buddhism became one of the leading religions of India. The group of foreign invaders that appeared on Indian soil from the first century B.C. onwards were attracted by its liberality and simplicity and accepted Buddhism in large numbers. One of these, the Greek king Menander, lived in the Buddhist tradition, as *raja* Milinda. But by far the greatest name among the foreign patrons of Buddhism is that of Kanishka. His fame in the Buddhist world is only second to that of Ashoka. During his time Buddhism spread to central Asia, China, South East Asia and West. Like Ashoka, Kanishka called a Buddhist council – the fourth council in Kashmir under the joint presidentship of Vasumitra and Ashvaghosha. The convening of this council led to the division of Buddhism into two broad sects – the Hinayana and the Mahayana. While the Hinayana followed the older order and philosophy of Buddhism, the Mahayana introduced many new elements in the older order.

Fig. 17.1 *The Great Stupa at Sanchi*

Some new features that were introduced in the older order were :

(i) The introduction of a belief in the *Bodhisttavas,* being those "who were in the process of obtaining, but had not yet obtained, Buddhahood".

(ii) Buddha began to be worshipped in the icon form with elaborate rituals instead of symbols. To Hinayanists, Buddha was a great teacher and the Mahayanists considered him as God.

(iii) Hinayanists believed in the salvation of individual as the goal of life while Mahayanaists believed in the salvation of all beings.

(iv) Sanskrit was adopted as the language of the religious literature, and a new cannon was developed differing from the old in many essential respects.

The development of Mahayana philosophy is ascribed to Nagarjuna, a contemporary of Kanishka. He propounded *madhyamika* school of Buddhist philosophy popularly known as *sunyavada.*

Jainism

Jainism also flourished during this period along with Buddhism and enjoyed patronage of kings and wealthy people. The group of Jain monks began to settle in different parts of the country. One group from Magadha moved towards west and settled in Saurashtra, while the other group settled in Kalinga where it enjoyed royal patronage under king Kharvela. In south India their main concentration was in Karnataka and in Tamil Nadu. Sravanbelagola in modern Karnataka became the great centre of Jainism. Despite the divisions, Jain communities remained more faithful to its original teaching hence the number of its adherents has remained fairly constant.

Vedic Religion

Vedic religion did not remain unchanged through all these centuries. Some of the Vedic Gods had quietly passed into oblivion and some were reborn as new Gods with additional attributes. This was the time when the Vedic religion assumed features which today are recognised as Hinduism. This new religious development was based on the philosophy of the *Upanishads* with its concept of the absolute or universal soul. This concept also helped to develop the idea of the Trinity of Gods at this time – *Brahma* as the creator, *Vishnu* as the preserver, and *Siva* (also known as Rudra and Mahesh) as the God who eventually destroys the universe when it is evil ridden. Of the three Gods, the cult of Vishnu and Siva, sometime associated with *Sakti* cult became more popular.

One form of Vaishnavism is Bhagavatism. The supreme deity of Bhagavatism was Vasudeva Krishna, son of Devaki, of the Vrishni family. By the second century B.C. this new sect had spread in a large area as inscriptional evidence shows. The famous Besnagar (district Vidisa, Madhya Pradesh) inscription mentions that Heliodorus, the Greek

ambassador of King Antialcidas, called himself *Bhagavata* and erected a *Garudadhavja*, in honour of Vasudeva, at Besnagar. It is thus apparent that Bhagavatism like Buddhism was popular enough to attract the foreigners. The philosophy of Bhagvatism is described in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Other early inscriptions related to Bhagavatism came from Ghosundi (Rajasthan), Mathura (Uttar Pradesh) and Nasik (Maharashtra).

Saivism seems to have evolved from the Vedic God Rudra and the Harappan deity known as Pasupati. The worship of Siva incorporated a number of fertility cults such as those of phallic emblem (*lingam*), the bull (*Nandi*) etc. and was also associated with *Sakti* cult. The most common cult object of the Saivas is *lingam*, the earliest specimens of which have been found in the Harappan period. One of the important schools of *Saivism* was Pasupata sect funded by Lakulin or Lakulisa around second century B.C. Saivism also attracted the foreigners. Wema Kadphises the second king of the Kushana dynasty was a Saiva. The reverse of some of his coins depict the figures of Siva, with a long trident and bull, and the legend refers to him as devotee of *Siva*.

In addition to Vaishnavism and Saivism, other minor sect that became popular during this period were those related to Sakti, Ganapati, Skanda, Surya etc. The characteristics features of all these sects were a gradual shift in emphasis from rituals to the view that a completely personal relationship between God and the devotee was possible. This relationship was the one where God could bestow his grace on the devotee, and the degree of devotion or *bhakti* varied from person to person. This idea of personal devotion or *bhakti* was to became the dynamic force of later Hinduism.

It was in the first century A.D. that Christianity was introduced in India by the traders from the west. The coming

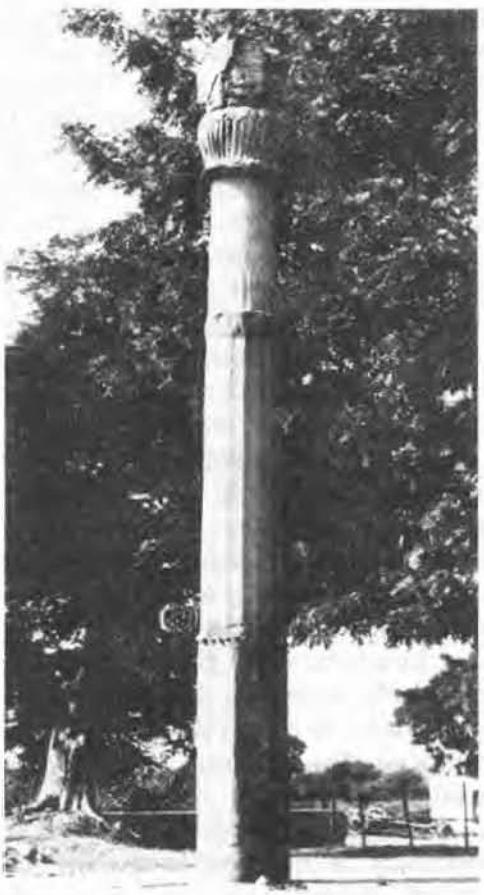


Fig. 17.2 *Besnagar Pillar of Heliodorus, near Vidisa*

of Christianity is associated with the legend of St. Thomas, who according to the Catholic Church of Edessa, came twice on mission to India.

Economic Condition

The period witnessed all round development in the field of agriculture, industry and trade. Agriculture was the main occupation of a large section of the people. Outside the *grama* lay the arable land of the village, the *grama-kshetra* which was protected by fences and field–watchmen against pests like birds and beasts. Land was held by individuals as well as by the state. Sometimes the land holdings were big consisting of upto 1,000 acres. Usually holdings were small enough that could be cultivated by the individual family. Beyond the arable land of the village lay its pastures, which were common for the grazing of cattle, and also those belonging to the state. Kautilya gives a complete scheme of village plan. The land of the village was divided into – cultivated, uncultivated, grove, forest, pastures etc. Among the crops, rice of different varieties, coarse grains, sesame, saffron, pulses, wheat, linseed, sugarcane, mustard and large number of vegetables and fruits were grown. On the boundary of the village was generally a forest. The village had artisans like carpenter, potter, blacksmith, barber, rope maker, washerman etc.

Remarkable progress in trade and industry is noticeable during this period. A large number of arts and crafts and occupations are not only referred to in literature and epigraphic records, but also represented in the sculptures. The literature refers to eighteen types of guilds. Guilds became an important institution in the economy. The guilds implemented well defined rules of work and controlled the quality of the finished product and its prices to safeguard both the artisans and the customers. The behaviour of the guild members was controlled through a guild court. The guilds also acted as a banker, financier and a trustee. These functions were carried out by a different category of merchants known as *sresthies* in north India and *chettis* in south India. Guilds also carried out benevolent and welfare works such as ivory workers guild at

Fig. 17.3 *The Gateway of Sanchi Stupa*

Vidisa carved the stone sculptures on the gateways and railings surrounding the stupa at Sanchi. Mining and metal industry had grown very important. Markets and streets were established in cities for different goods. Markets for perishable foods were located outside the town at their gates. Loans were given on security of gold and other things. Money was lent for interest on promising rates to be renewed every year. The Nasik cave inscription refers to the interest rates on money deposited to guilds. The usual rate of interest was between 12% and 15% per annum.

Trade is the natural corollary of industry and it is the main channel of distribution of industrial products. From the Mauryan period, both internal and external trade was vigorous in most parts of India. All the internal cities and ports were interconnected with a well knit road system. A large number of modern national highways were developed during this period including Grand Trunk road which was very much a part of Uttarapath and was later developed by Chandragupta Maurya. The same road was further maintained and developed by Sher Shah Suri. The discovery of monsoon winds in the first century facilitated to reduce the distance between the western ports of India to the ports of Alexanderia in Egypt. With the help of monsoon winds the whole distance could be covered in forty days or so. India's trade with Rome increased enormously by sea as well

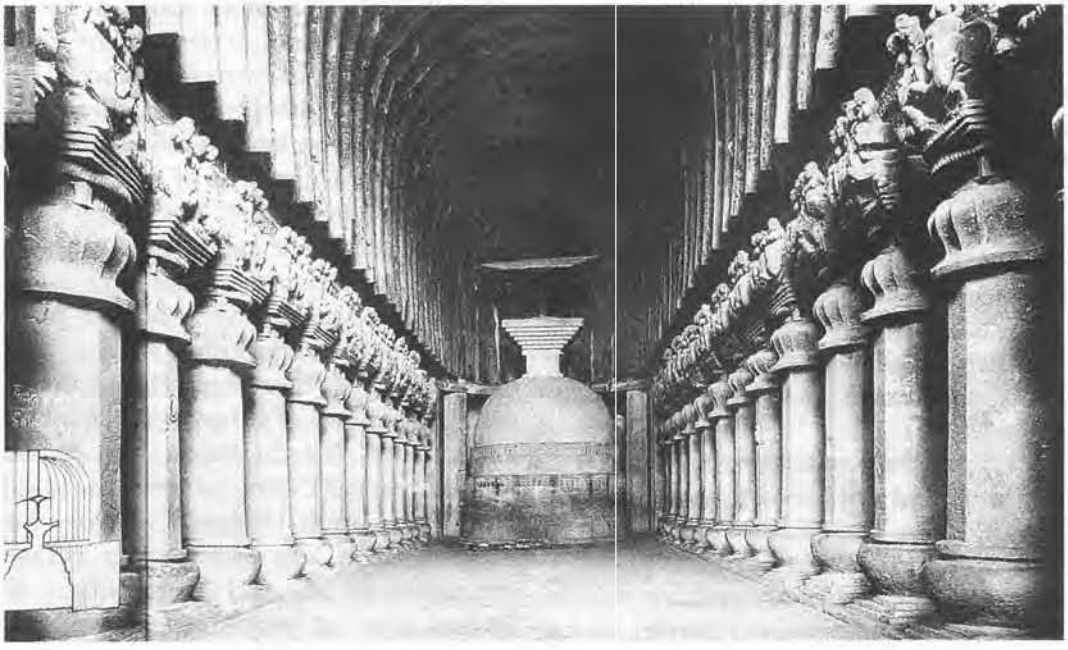


Fig. 17.4 *Karle Cave*

as by land route which is generally known as the silk route. This connected the world from China to Rome and served as a transmitter of not only the trading commodity but the culture, ideas and religion etc.

About the trading commodities the author of *Periplus of Erythean Sea*, accounts of Roman historians like Pliny, Ptolemy etc. Indian literature, both in Tamil and Sanskrit, refer to the trading establishments and items of trade like Indian spices, sandalwood and other variety of woods, pearls, textiles of various types, sea products, metals, semi-precious stones and animals. Arikamedu was an important Roman settlement and trading station. It was located close to a port and was excavated in 1945. The Romans paid for the goods mainly in gold currency. The number of hoards of Roman coins found in the Deccan and south India indicate the volume of this trade in favour of India. The Roman historian Pliny laments that Indian trade was a serious drain on the wealth of Rome, when 550 million *sesterces* went to India each year on luxury items. One of the lasting results of this contact was the fairly detailed reference made about India in the various works of the Roman period.

Trade and contacts with Rome and the west was not the only commercial outlet open for India. India saw a growth in Indo-China relations and the introduction of Indian culture South East Asia. It has been referred to as *Suvarnabhumi* in the literature of the period.

Art and Architecture

The excavation of the Taxila, Sakala, Bhita, Kausambi, Ahichchhatra, Patliputra, Nagarjunkonda, Amaravati, Kaveripattanam and the description of some of these cities in the literature depict that these cities were well planned, protected by fortification walls and moats. Beautiful and large gateways were erected with lofty towers. The houses were big and beautiful.

In the field of architecture the new activities were witnessed. Some scholars think the Sunga period represents the Brahmanical reaction against Buddhism. But the art and architectural activities reflect totally a a contradictory story. Sanchi, Amaravati, Bharhut and Sarnath stupas are the best examples of Buddhist art and architecture that flourished during this period. The stupa is a hemispherical dome or mound built over sacred relics either of the Buddha himself or of a sanctified monk or a sacred text. The relics were generally kept in a casket in a smaller chamber in the centre of the base of the stupa. The stupa has a fenced path called *pradakshinapatha*. At the four cardinal points there was a break in the railing because of gateways. The four gateways of Sanchi stupa built in the first century B.C. are extremely artistic with every inch of space utilised for carving and are one of the finest examples of art and architecture of India. One of these gateways was donated by the Guild of ivory workers of Vidisa.

Fig. 17.5 *Amaravati Stupa*

Another form of architecture is represented by rock-cut caves. These rock-cut caves are of two types. The one with a stupa and worshipping hall called *chaitya* and monastery called *vihara*. The famous cave of Karle consist of a fairly complicated structure, all cut into the rock. The ceilings of a few of these caves show an imitation of a barrel vault with wooden ribs. This indicates the impact of wooden construction in stone.

Sculpture

The post Mauryan period is an age of great sculptural activity. Bharhut, Sanchi, Bodh Gaya, Mathura, Amaravati, Gandhara were the important centres of art activities. The Mathura and Gandhara schools flourished during the Kushana period. The Mathura school has the distinction of having produced the first image of the Buddha. Mathura also produced many fine specimens of sculptures that include, images of Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist deities and the life size sculptures of *yakshas*, *yakshini* and portraits of kings.

In the north-west, developed the hybrid Indo-Greek form of art where, though the themes were Indian, the depiction was heavily influenced by western art. It is popularly known as Gandhara School of Art. The Gandhara school depicted, almost exclusively, Buddhist themes. Stucco was a popular medium in Gandhara art and the monasteries of Afghanistan were decorated with an abundance of stucco images. Gandhara artists produced the images of Buddha in different postures and sizes. The large statues of Buddha at Bamiyan were one of the finest example of the Gandhara art.

Fig. 17.6 *Statue of Buddha from Mathura*

Fig. 17.7 *Statue of Jain Tirthankara from Mathura*

Fig. 17.8 *Fasting Buddha from Gandhara*

Terracotta art also flourished during this time. The most prolific centres of its production were Ahichchhatra, Mathura, Kausambi, Bhita, Rajghat, Pataliputra, Tamralipti, Mahasthan etc.

Science and Technology

Engineering skills are evident from the remains of the building of dams and irrigation works. The famous example is the dam built during Chandragupta Maurya's period and repaired by Saka

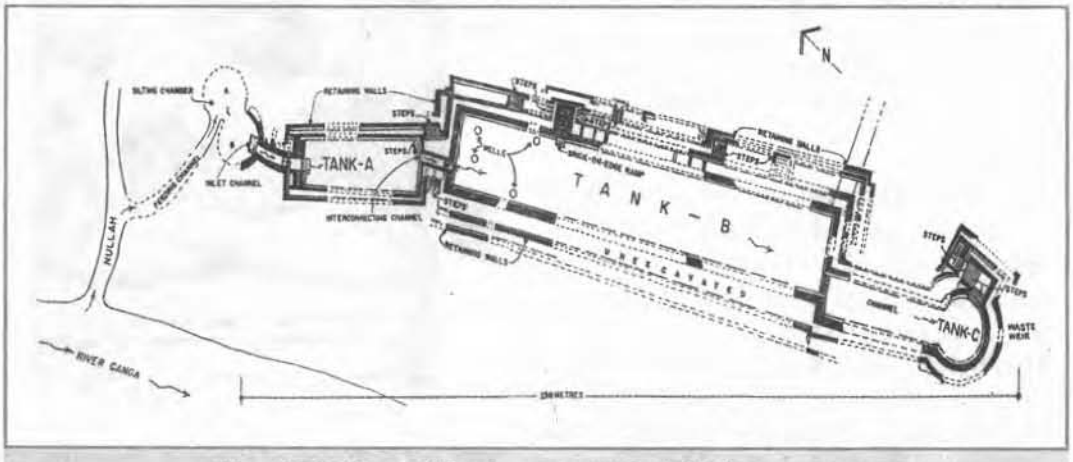


Fig. 17.9 *Plan of Tank excavated at Shringaverapura*

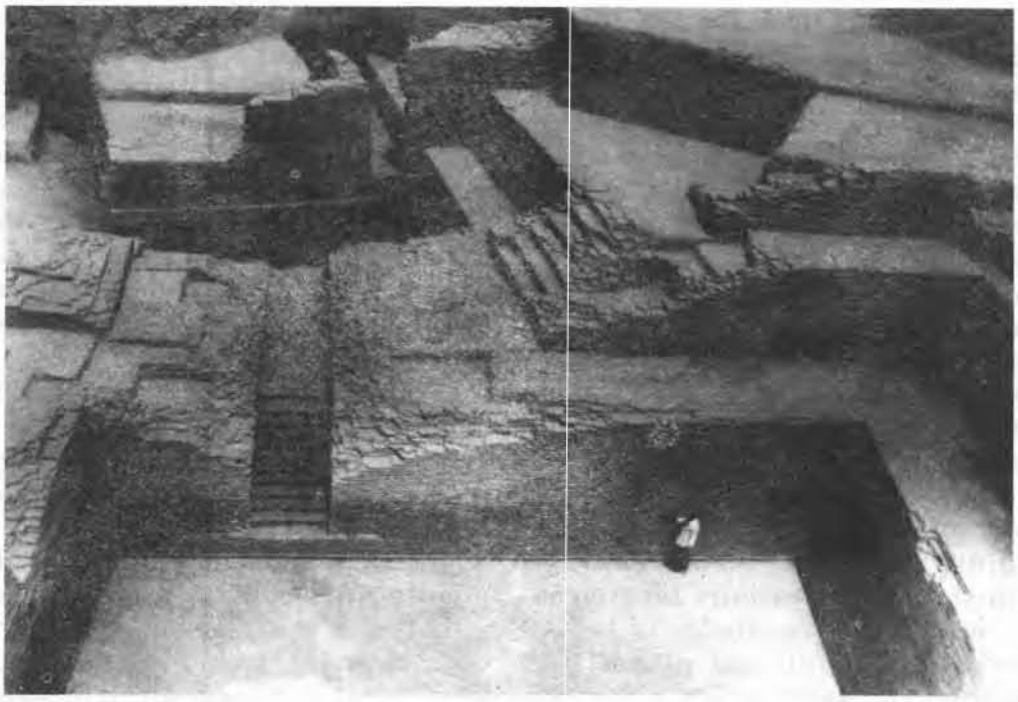


Fig. 17.10 *Excavated view of one of the tanks at Shringaverapura*

king Rudradaman. One of the most remarkable structure that has been excavated is a complex of four water tanks at Shringaverapura which shows a very advanced level of hydrolic engineering. The tanks are built of millions of bricks and water was brought from the river Ganga through a canal. It measures about 250 mts in length and 38 mts in width. It would have contained about eighty lakh litres of water. The use of geometry in building construction and town planning became obvious. In the field of astronomy, Indian astronomers developed much more elaborate astronomical system after modifying and adopting the more accurate values by counting the periods of revolution of the sun, the moon, the five planets and two nodes known as *Rahu* and *Ketu*. Eclipses were also predicted with accuracy. All these observations have been described by Varahamihira in *Pancha Siddhantika* which gives the summary of five schools of astronomy present in his time.

The Indian medicinal system made remarkable progress during this period. It was based on the theory of three humours – air, bile and phlegm – the correct balance of these gave in a healthy body. The surgical equipment commonly consisted of twenty-five types of knives and needles, thirty probes, twenty-six articles of dressing etc.

Ayurveda has its origin in *Atharavaveda*. During this time, medicine became a regular subject, of study at centres of learning like Taxila and Varanasi. The school at Varanasi specialised in surgery and *Sushruta Samhita* is an encyclopaedia of surgery, compiled by the great surgeon Sushruta. At Taxila, the teachings of Atreya were collected by his pupils and compiled by Charaka in his *Charaka Samhita*. Charaka and Sushruta were the contemporaries of Kushana king Kanishka.

The works of Charaka and Sushruta reached as far as Manchuria, China, Central Asia through translations in various languages. Evidently, the knowledge of Indian herbs and medicinal plants had reached the western world through Greeks and Romans. Theophrastus gives details of the medicinal use of various plants and herbs from India in his book *History of Plants*. Arabic translation of *Charaka* and *Sushruta Samhitas* in the eighth century A.D. influenced European and west Asian medicinal system during the middle ages.

By the beginning of the Christian era, there was large scale production of copper, iron, steel, brass, and their alloys. The large number of gold and silver coins shows the purity of metal and craftsmanship of the period.

India and her relations with the outside world

As you have learnt earlier, India established its external contacts from the Harappan period onwards. Excavation at Harappan and Mesopotamian cities reveal material remains which clearly establish trade relations. The Boghaz Koi Inscriptions of the fourteenth century B.C. records the names of deities like Indra, Mitra, Varuna and twin Nasatyas as well as numerical and other words of Indian origin which shows close contacts.

With the rise of the Persian Empire in the sixth century B.C. the foundation was laid for regular contacts between India and the West. Persians under Darius I unified a vast area of land from Afghanistan to Mediterranean sea. To maintain its control properly they established road, postal system and other means of communication. These were linked with India which provided a great impetus to trade and exchange of ideas.

A new dimension to this contact was added by the invasion of Alexander in the last quarter of the fourth century B.C. Alexander came up to the north-western frontiers of India and established several cities and settlement of Greek people on his way. The famous city of Alexandria in Egypt became the great meeting point of the East and West. The first three Mauryan kings namely, Chandragupta Maurya, Bindusara and Ashoka established intimate relations with the Greek kingdoms of the West. We have the evidence of a matrimonial alliance between Chandragupta Maurya and Seleucus, a Greek King of Syria. Megasthenese and Daimachus lived in

the Mauryan court as ambassadors of the Seleucid kings. Dionysius was an ambassador of Egyptian king Ptolemy Philadelphus to Mauryan court. The diplomatic relationship between India and the West are recorded in the Rock Edict XIII of Ashoka also, in which five Greek rulers are specifically named, and it is claimed that on account of the activities of Ashoka's missionaries his dhamma spread to these countries.

One important development of this commercial and political intercourse was that an increasingly large number of people from India and the West visited each other's country. The contacts are recorded in detail in the works of Strabo's *Geography*, Arrian's *Indica*, Pliny the elder's *Natural History*, the *Periplus of Erythraen sea* and Ptolemy's *Geography*. India had come to occupy an important position in the world as known to the Greeco-Romans.

A number of Indian kings sent embassies to Rome. The best known Indian embassy was sent to Rome about 25 B.C. It took about four years to reach Rome. It presented animals and other gifts were presented to the Roman king, Augustus. Indian art and coinage bear marks of Hellenistic influences. The Gandhara school of art and coins of Indo-Greek and Kushana kings are its best examples. In the field of religion both influenced each other as is shown in the philosophical development of Greeco-Roman world. Christianity reached India as early as first century A.D. through these commercial and cultural contacts. Indian religion, such as Bhagavatism, Saivism and Buddhism influenced the foreigners. The people as well as the kings of the Kushanas, Sakas, Indo-Greeks, Parthians dynasties adopted Indian religion and culture and become a part of the Indian society. The cultural contacts between India and central Asia, China and eastern Asia also began during this period. These have been discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Exercises

1. Explain the following:
   Sangams, *Dharmasastras, Boddhisattvas, Pratiloma, Anuloma, Shreni, Pradakshinapatha*
2. Write a note on the language and literature of the period.
3. Describe the rise of Mahayanism.
4. Write a note on Bhagavatism.
5. Describe the social conditions of the period.
6. Write a note on the four *Ashramas*.

7. Describe the economic conditions with special reference to trade and commerce.
8. Write about the development in the field of architecture.
9. Write a note on Gandhara and Mathura schools of arts.
10. Write about the developments in the field of science and technology.
11. Write an essay on India's contacts with the outside world.

Things to Do

- On an outline map of India show the major routes connecting important trade centres in India.
- On an outline map of world show the silk route and connect it with Indian trade routes.
- Visit museums and collect pictures of coins of this period and identify them.

CHAPTER 18

INDIA FROM THE GUPTAS TO HARSHA

LIKE the Mauryas a few centuries earlier, the Guptas made a permanent impact on Indian history by building up a large empire and by firmly establishing several trends of Indian culture which had begun in the earlier periods.

Emergence of the Guptas

As you have seen in the earlier chapter, north India intermittently came under the rule of several foreign people, such as the *Yavanas* (the name given to the Greeks, Romans and west Asians) Kushanas, Sakas, Parthians, etc. These people began to settle in north-west India from the first century B.C. onwards. Most of these people came to India due to the turbulent condition in central Asia. They adapted themselves with Indian culture, and at the same time, introduced some new elements in it. Between the first century B.C. and third century A.D. the Satavahanas in the Deccan, the Kushanas in the north and the Sakas in the west emerged as the three big political powers, and worked as a stabilising factor in these regions. The empires of the Satavahanas and Kushanas came to an end in the middle of the third century A.D. and a new dynasty emerged in north India, known as the Guptas. Like the Mauryas a few centuries earlier, the Guptas made a permanent impact on Indian history by building up a large empire and by firmly establishing several trends of Indian culture which had begun in the earlier periods. The Gupta kings are known not only for their political might and strength but also for great achievements in the field of science, art, culture and literature.

About the early Guptas we do not know much in detail. The Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta mentions *maharaja* Srigupta and *maharaja* Ghatotkacha as his ancestors. I-tsing, who travelled India from A.D. 671 to 695 refers to Srigupta as the builder of a temple at Gaya for the Chinese pilgrims, 500 years before his time. This king Srigupta has been identified with the first Gupta king of that name mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription. The *Puranas* mention that the early Guptas controlled the area along the Ganga (the middle Gangetic basin), Prayag (Allahabad and surrounding region), Saketa (Ayodhya region) and Magadha. Srigupta was succeeded by his son Ghatotkacha who too is referred to as *maharaja* in Gupta records.

In A.D. 320 Chandragupta I succeeded his father Ghatotkacha. It is said that he laid the foundation of the great Gupta empire. Chandragupta I married a Lichchhavi princess Kumaradevi. The Lichchhavis (to whom Gautama Buddha belongs) were an old and established *Ganarajya* and quite powerful, still being respected in north India. This marriage alliance of Chandragupta I was important for his political career as is proved by the coins of Chandragupta I and Kumaradevi type. These coins portray the figures of Chandragupta and Kumaradevi and mention the name of the Lichchhavis. Samudragupta, son of Chandragupta I and Kumaradevi, in the Allahabad inscription proudly called himself *Lichchhavis-dauhitra* 'son of the daughter of Lichchhavis'. Chandragupta I introduced a new era, the Gupta era, starting with his coronation in A.D. 320. He was

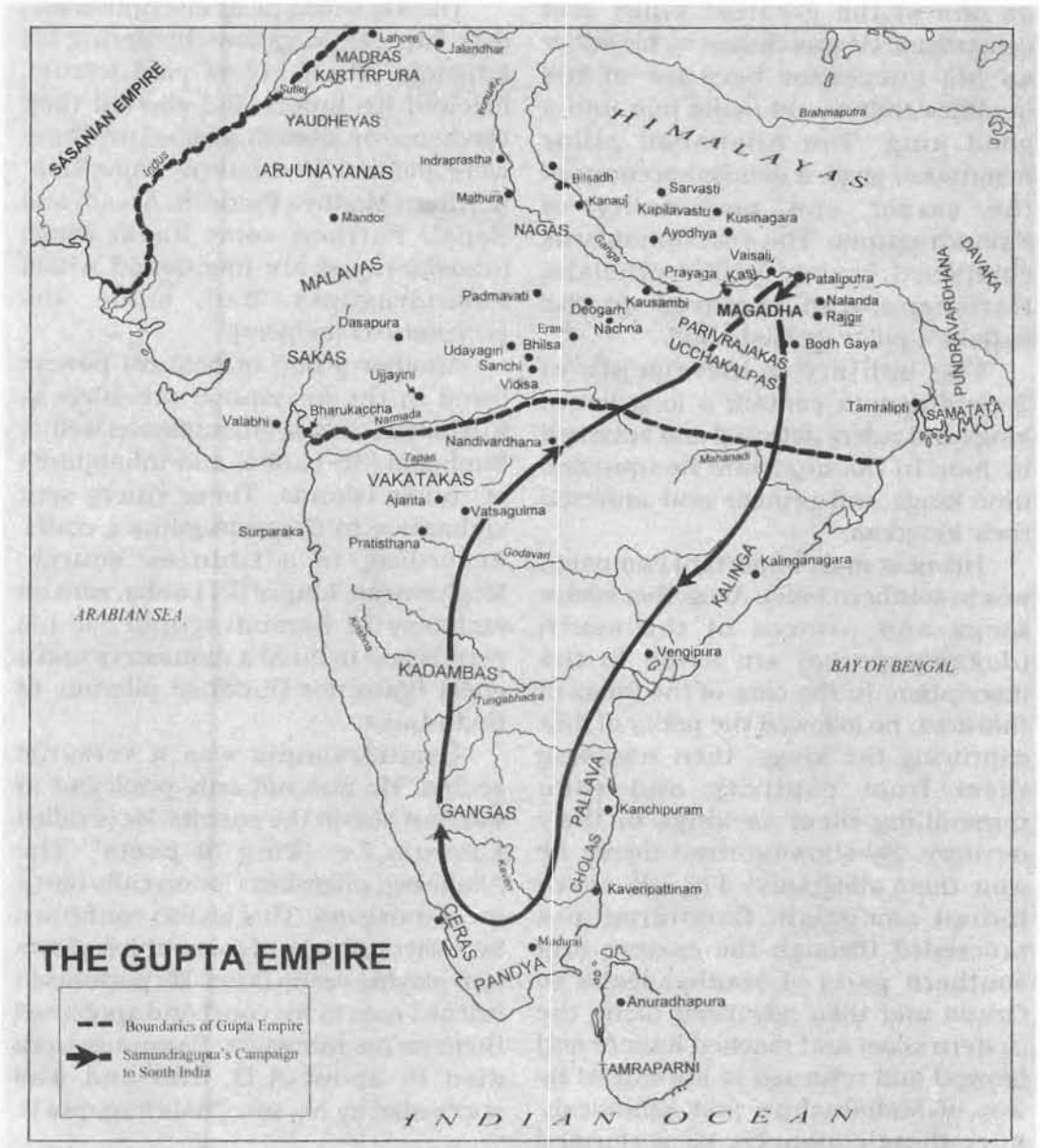


Fig. 18.1 *Map of the Gupta Empire*

the first Gupta king to adopt the title *maharajadhiraja* and issued gold coins.

Samudragupta

Samudragupta succeeded his father about A.D. 340. He earned a reputation

as one of the greatest kings and conquerors. He was chosen by his father as his successor because of his qualities that would make him into a good king. The Allahabad pillar inscription gives a detailed account of the career and personality of Samudragupta. The inscription was composed by one of his officials, Harishena, and engraved on the Ashoka's pillar at Allahabad.

The military achievements of Samudragupta contain a long list of kings and rulers defeated and subdued by him. In the *aryavarta* he uprooted nine kings and princes and annexed their kingdom.

His next most important campaign was in southern India. Altogether twelve kings and princes of the south (*dakshinapatha*) are listed in the inscription. In the case of the kings of this area, he followed the policy of first capturing the kings, then releasing them from captivity and then reinstalling them as kings in their territory. By showing royal mercy he won their allegiance. For his south Indian campaign, Samudragupta proceeded through the eastern and southern parts of Madhyadesha to Orissa and then advanced along the eastern coast and reached Kanchi and beyond and returned to his capital by way of Maharashtra and Khandesh. After these conquests he performed *Ashvamedhayajna*. On this occasion he issued gold coins depicting the sacrificial horse and bearing the legend conveying that he performed the *Ashvamedha* sacrifice.

The Allahabad pillar inscription also lists fourteen kingdoms bordering his kingdom. These rulers paid tribute, followed his orders and showed their obedience by attending his court. These were located in eastern Rajasthan, northern Madhya Pradesh, Assam and Nepal. Further, some forest kings (*atavika-rajas*) are mentioned whom Samudragupta had made his *paricharaka* (helpers).

Another group of political powers listed in the inscription are such as Kushanas, Sakas, Murundas as well as Simhalas (Sri Lanka) and inhabitants of other islands. These rulers sent embassies to Samudragupta's court. According to a Chinese source, Meghavarna, king of Sri Lanka, sent an embassy to Samudragupta for his permission to build a monastery and a guest house for Buddhist pilgrims at Bodh Gaya.

Samudragupta was a versatile genius. He was not only proficient in war, but also in the *sastras*. He is called *kaviraja* i.e. 'king of poets'. The Allahabad pillar inscription calls him a great musician. This is also confirmed by his lyricist type of coins which shows him playing veena (lute). He patronised learned men in his court and appointed them as his ministers. Samudragupta died in about A.D. 380 and was succeeded by his son Chandragupta II.

Chandragupta II

The Gupta empire reached its highest glory, both in terms of territorial expansion and cultural excellence, under Chandragupta II, son of

Samudragupta and Dattadevi. Like his father, Chandragupta II was chosen by his father as his successor. Chandragupta II inherited a strong and consolidated empire from his father, which he further extended. He established matrimonial alliance with Vakatakas and married his daughter Prabhavatigupta to Rudrasena II of the Vakataka dynasty. Chandragupta II probably concluded this alliance with the Vakatakas before attacking the Sakas so as to be sure of having a friendly power to back him up in Deccan. After the death of Rudrasena II, Prabhavatigupta acted as a regent on behalf of her two minor sons. During her regency, which lasted over twenty years, and even after that, the relations between the Guptas and Vakatakas remained friendly and close.

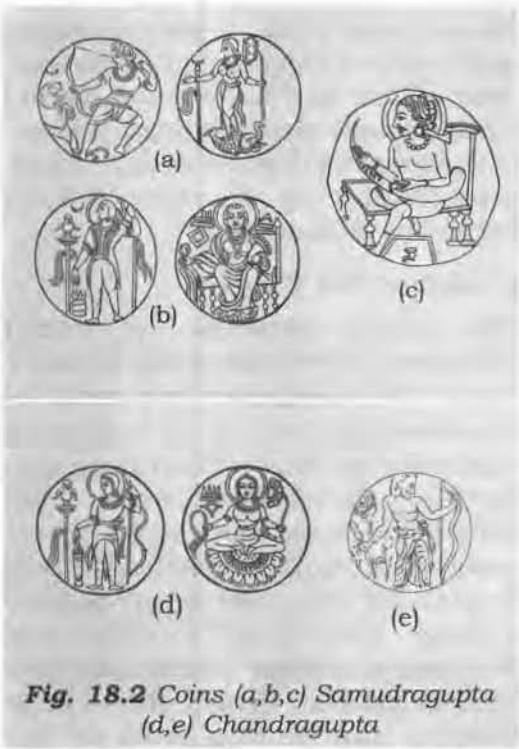


Fig. 18.2 *Coins (a,b,c) Samudragupta (d,e) Chandragupta*

His foremost success was his victory over the mighty Sakas dynasty. The annexation of their prosperous kingdom comprising Gujarat and part of Malwa not only strengthened the Gupta empire but also brought it into direct touch with western sea ports. This gave a tremendous impetus to overseas trade and commerce. Ujjain, a great centre of trade, religion and culture, became the second capital of the Gupta empire after the conquest. Perhaps it was after this victory over Sakas, that Chandragupta II adopted the title of Vikramaditya, which became popular in the legends as a patroniser of learned men and a great liberator who overthrew the yoke of foreign rule. The identification of Chandragupta II with Vikramaditya is doubted by some scholars. Chandragupta II issued dated silver coins to commemorate his victory over Saka kshatrapas.

The Mehrauli iron pillar inscription erected originally in front of a temple of Vishnu (near Qutub Minar in Delhi) records the exploits of a king named Chandra. He is said to have vanquished the group of enemies in Vanga (Bengal), perfumed the southern ocean by the breeze of his prowess and overcome the Vahlikas (across the Indus river). This king Chandra of iron pillar is generally identified as Chandragupta II. This would mean his kingdom extended from Bengal to the north-west frontiers.

Other than his conquests, Chandragupta II's reign is remembered

for his patronage of literature and arts and for the high standard of artistic and cultural life. Kalidas the great Sanskrit poet was a member of his court. Fa-Hien, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim visited India between A.D. 405 and A.D. 411 collecting Buddhist manuscripts and text and studying at Indian monasteries. He described the country as a happy and prosperous one.

Kumaragupta I

Chandragupta II died about A.D. 413 and was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta I, who enjoyed a reign of more than forty years. Like his grandfather, Samudragupta, he issued *Ashvamedha* type of coins. He may have performed an *Ashvamedha* sacrifice, though we do not know of any of his military achievements. The epigraphic records, however, show that he organised the administration of vast empire and maintained its peace, prosperity and security for a long period of forty years. This is no small credit upon his tact and ability. At the end of Kumaragupta's reign, the Gupta empire was challenged by the Pushyamitras, a community living on the banks of the Narmada. Skandagupta, son of Kumaragupta I and future king fought and subdued them and restored peace.

Skandagupta

Kumaragupta I died in A.D. 455 and was succeeded by his son Skandagupta. His succession to the throne was not peaceful and perhaps there was a struggle between him and his brother Purugupta. Skandagupta's reign seems to have been full of wars. His greatest enemies were the Hunas, a ferocious barbarian horde which lived in central Asia and were at this very time threatening also the mighty Roman empire in the west. One branch of them, known as white Hunas, occupied the Oxus valley and advanced against both Persia and India. They crossed the Hindukush, occupied Gandhara and defied the Gupta empire. Skandagupta inflicted such a terrible defeat upon the Hunas that for half a century they dared not disturb the Gupta empire, though they to wrought havoc on Persia during this period. Another important event of Skandagupta's reign is the restoration and repair of the dam on Sudarsana lake which had been built during Chandragupta Maurya's reign. We have seen above that this lake was previously repaired during the reign of Saka kshatrapa Rudradaman I.

Decline of the Guptas

The Gupta dynasty, no doubt continued to be in existence for more than 100 years after the death of Skandagupta in A.D. 467. He was succeeded by his brother Purugupta. Nothing is known about his achievements and perhaps there were none to his credit. Thereafter, the only Gupta ruler who continued to rule fairly a large part of the empire was Budhagupta, whose inscriptions have been found from Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. His

successors were not able to handle the administration, rebellions of some governors and officials and the Huna invasion. Though the Huna rule was one of the shortest instances of foreign rule over India, the Gupta empire suffered much from it. The Hunas once more attacked under the leadership, of Toramana in A.D. 512. They conquered a large part of north India upto Gwalior and Malwa. Toramana was succeeded by his son Mihirakula who established his capital at Sakala (Sialkot). The Huna, rule in India was very short lived. Hiuen-Tsang describes how Mihirkula invaded Magadha, was defeated and captured by the Gupta king Baladitya, and how his life was saved at the intercession of the queen mother of Magadha. According to an inscription from Malwa, Yasovarman, a powerful local ruler of Malwa, also defeated Mihirakula. It is not known whether he did it independently or as an ally of Baladitya.

North India after the Guptas

From the decline of the Guptas until the rise of Harsha, in the beginning of seventh century, there flourished four major kingdoms in north India. These were the Guptas of Magadha, the Maukharis, the Pushyabhutis, and the Maitrakas. These powers vied with each other to succeed to the past glory of the Guptas. The present Guptas of Magadha (not to be confused with the main imperial Gupta dynasty) were a minor dynasty of Magadha. It is not possible to determine whether they were connected in any way with the imperial Guptas. Some of the kings of this family were very powerful and carried victorious arms as far as the Brahmaputra. The Maukharis held the region of western Uttar Pradesh around Kanauj. The Maukharis conquered a part of Magadha. Isanavarman and his son Sarvavarman were powerful Maukhari kings and adopted the title of *maharajadhiraja*. Isanavarman is remembered for the heroic opposition he offered to the Hunas who had once more moved towards the heart of India.

In the west, the Maitraka clan, under its leader Bhatarka, established a kingdom in Saurashtra with Valabhi as its capital. Under the Maitrakas, Valabhi became not only a seat of learning and culture, but also a centre of trade and commerce. Of the four main kingdoms, the Maitrakas survived the longest and ruled until the middle of the eighth century, when they succumbed to the attacks from the Arabs.

Another dynasty which was founded about the same time as Maitraka Valabhi, but was destined to play a far more distinguished part in Indian history, was that of Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar. The Pushyabhuti family came to the fore after the Huna invasion and made its political presence felt on the accession of Prabhakarvardhana. He assumed the title of *paramabhattaraka maharajadhiraja*. He has been described by Banabhatta as, "... a lion to the Huna deer, a burning fever to the king of Sindhu, a troubler of sleep of

Gurjara king, a bilious fever to that scent-elephant, the lord of Gandhara, destroyer of the skill of the Latas, an axe to the creeper which is the goddess of fortune of Malawa."

His sovereignty probably extended to the whole of the Punjab in the north-west and part of Malwa in the south. In the last phase of his rule there was a Huna invasion. He had two sons, Rajyavardhana and Harshavardhana and a daughter Rajyasri, married to the Maukhari king Grahavarman. While Prabhakaravardhana was rapidly extending the boundaries of his kingdom towards the west and south, two powerful kingdoms were established in Bengal and Assam.

About A.D. 525 an independent kingdom was established in Bengal. When the Gupta empire fell, Gauda comprising western and northern parts of Bengal, asserted its independence, but the Maukharis subdued it. Half a century later the throne of Gauda was occupied by Sasanka. He established his capital at Karnasuvarna (near Murshidabad) and soon made himself master of the whole of Bengal. He conquered Orissa and then advanced towards Kanauj in the west against the Maukharis. The Maukhari king Grahavarman was married to Rajyasri, daughter of Prabhakaravardhana. This marriage alliance strengthened the position of the two families. After the death of Prabhakaravardhana, Sasanka, with the help of Malawa king, invaded Kanauj. King Grahavarman was killed and the queen Rajyasri was thrown into prison. Hearing this news, Rajyavardhana immediately started with his troops to suppress the kings of Gauda and Malawa. But he was treacherously killed by Sasanka.

Harsha

After the death of Rajyavardhana, his younger brother, Harshavardhana also known as Siladitya, ascended the Pushyabhuti throne in A.D. 606 at the age of sixteen, and ruled for forty-one years. After Grahavarman's death, the Councilors of Maukhari state offered the throne to Harsha. The period of Harsha, in comparison with most other early Indian kings, is remarkably well documented. The poet Banabhatta has written a detailed account of the events leading upto his rise to power, in the *Harshacharita* (life of Harsha). At the same time the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang also wrote in great detail about Harsha and India of Harsha's time.

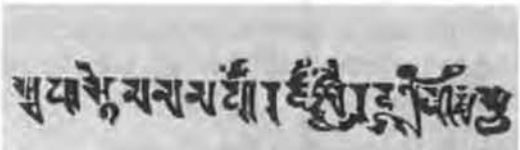


***Fig. 18.3** Signature of Harsha in his own handwriting*

After ascending to the throne Harsha first rescued his widowed sister, from the Vindhyan forest, where she was going to throw herself into the fire with all her attendants. Harsha

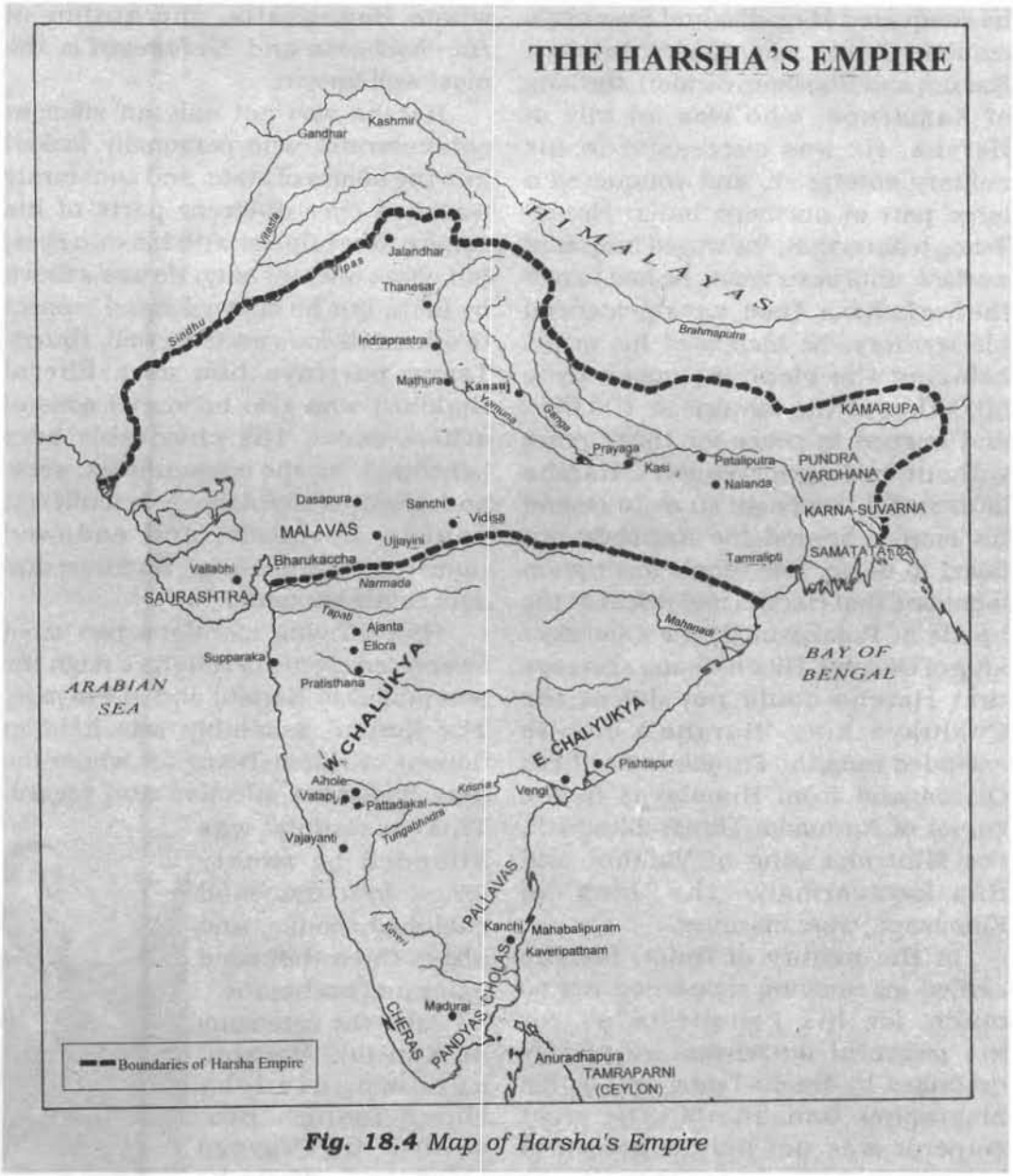


Fig. 18.4 *Map of Harsha's Empire*

thereafter, proceeded towards the east against Sasanka with a view to avenge the death of his brother, Rajyavardhana and brother-in-law, Grahavarman. Harsha was not successful in his first expedition against Gauda, but in his second expedition towards the close of his reign, after the death of Sasanka,

he conquered Magadha and Sasanka's empire. Gauda was divided between Harsha and Bhaskaravarman, the king of Kamarupa, who was an ally of Harsha. He was successful in his military enterprise, and conquered a large part of northern India. Hiuen-Tsang tells us that, "he waged incessant warfare, until in six years, he had fought the five Indians. Then, having extended his territory, he increased his army, bringing the elephant corps upto 60,000, and the cavalry to 100,000, and reigned in peace for thirty years without raising a weapon". Harsha launched a campaign so as to extend his empire beyond the Narmada but failed to do so. The Aihole inscription mentions that Harsha met defeat at the hands of Pulakesin II, the Chalukya king of Badami. Hiuen-Tsang also says that Harsha could not defeat the Chalukya king. Harsha's empire extended from the Punjab to northern Orissa and from Himalayas to the banks of Narmada. Dhruvabhatta II, the Maitraka king of Valabhi and Bhaskaravarman, the king of Kamarupa, were his allies.

In the history of India, Harsha earned an undying reputation not so much for his conquests as for his peaceful activities, so vividly described by Hiuen-Tsang and by his biographer Banabhatta. The great emperor was not only a patron of learning, but was himself an accomplished author. He wrote three Sanskrit plays – *Nagananda, Ratnavali* and *Priyadarsika*. He gathered around him a circle of learned men, of whom Banabhatta, the author of *Harshacharita* and *Kadambari* is the most well known.

Harsha was not only an efficient administrator who personally looked into the affairs of state, and constantly travelled over different parts of his empire to see things with his own eyes, but also a tolerant king. He was a Saiva by faith, but he showed equal respect to other religious sects as well. Hiuen-Tsang portrays him as a liberal Buddhist who also honoured gods of others sects. His charitable acts benefitted all the communities, sects and religions. Like Ashoka, he built rest houses, hospitals, and endowed numerous Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain establishments.

Hiuen-Tsang mentions two most celebrated events of Harsha's reign the assemblies at Kanauj and at Prayaga. The Kanauj assembly was held in honour of Hiuen-Tsang for whom the king had great affection and regard. This assembly was attended by twenty kings, four thousand Buddhist monks, and about three thousand Jains and brahmans.

After the ceremony at Kanuaj, Harsha, accompanied by Hiuen-Tsang, proceeded to Prayaga (Allahabad), where he used to celebrate religious festivals at the end of every five years, at the confluence

Fig. 18.5
Hiuen-Tsang

of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Saraswati. Here he performed the ceremony of *dana*, which lasted for about three months. During these three months most of the accumulation of five year's wealth was exhausted. He even gave his clothes and jewellery and once begged from his sister an ordinary garment to put on. Harsha attended six such assemblies at Prayaga in his life time and donated all he had. Harsha sent an embassy in A.D. 641 with Hiuen-Tsang to the Chinese emperor and received the Chinese embassy in return. He died in A.D. 647. Harsha does not appear to have any heir to his throne, which was usurped after his death by his minister.

Deccan and South India

In Deccan and south India, after the Satavahana rule had ended in the first half of the third century A.D., the Vakatakas rose to power in the second half of the third century A.D. Not much is known about the founder of this dynasty, Vindhyasakti. His son and successor Pravarasena was the real founder of the Vakataka empire in western and central India. He is the only Vakataka ruler to whom the title *samrat* was accorded. He performed *Vajapeya* and four *Ashvamedhayajnas*. The Vakataka empire was divided by the successors of Pravarsena into two parts. The main branch and the other known as Vatsagulma branch. The importance of the Vakatakas as a political power in western and central Deccan was realised by Chandragupta II, who married his daughter Prabhavati Gupta into the Vakataka family. The Vakatakas and the Guptas remained friendly for a long-time. After the Vakatakas, three major kingdoms, namely the Chalukyas of Badami, Pallavas of Kanchipuram and Pandyas of Madurai dominated the Deccan and south India for about 300 years.

The Vakatakas in the Deccan were followed by the Chalukyas of Badami. The Chalukyas began with a base at Vatapi or Badami and Aihole, from where they moved northwards and annexed the areas around Nasik and the upper Godavari region. Pulakesin II was the greatest king of Chalukya dynasty, who ruled from A.D. 610 to 642 He was the contemporary of Harshavardhana of Kanauj. The detailed account of his victories as well as early history of the Chalukyas is recorded in the Aihole inscription composed by Ravikirti. Vishnuvardhan, son of Pulakesin II, founded the eastern branch of the Chalukyas with its capital first at Pishtapuri and later at Vengi. This branch remained independent of the main or western branch and exercised uninterrupted sway over the kingdom up to the twelfth century. The Rashtrakutas succeeded the Chalukyas of Badami and maintained the vast empire in the Deccan. The first known ruler of the dynasty was Dantidurga I who conquered Badami in A.D. 752, defeating the Chalukyas.

The contemporaries of the Chalukyas and the Pallavas in the Deccan were the Gangas and the

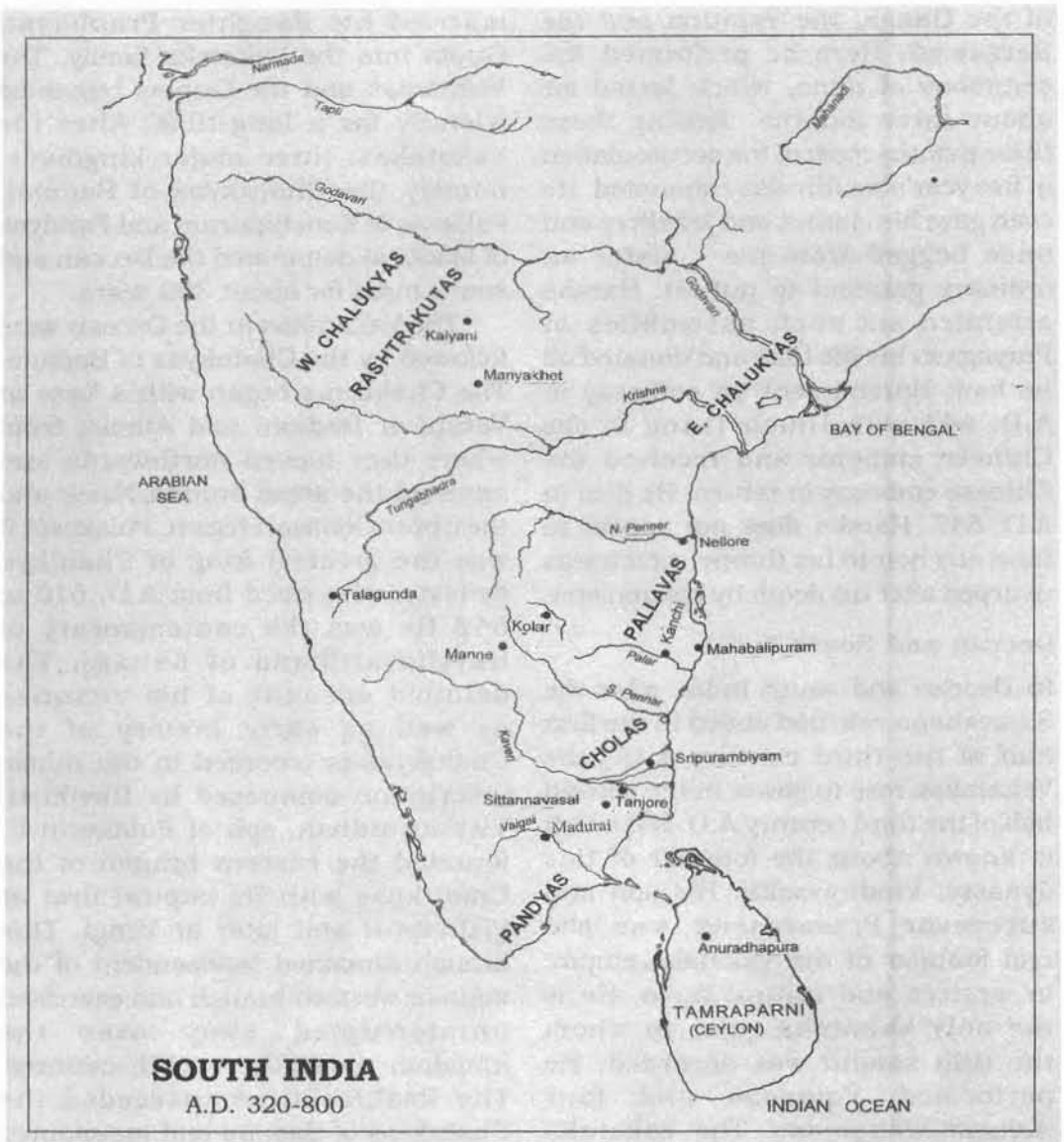


***Fig. 18.6** Map of South India*

Kadambas. The western Gangas, so called, to distinguish them from the eastern Gangas of Kalinga, ruled over a large part of modern Mysore. The region was called after them as Gangavadi. The founder of the family, Konkanivarman Dharmamahadhiraja, probably ruled in the second half of the fourth century A.D. and had his capital at Kolar. They ruled independently from

A.D. 350-550. They had matrimonial relations with the Pallavas, the Chalukyas of Badami and the Rashtrakutas who were their powerful contemporaries.

Ganga king Durvinita was a prominent ruler and scholar of Kannada and Sanskrit literature. Sripurusha was another important ruler of dynasty who shifted his capital Manyapura (Manne near Bangalore) and his kingdom was known as Srirajya, evidently on account of its prosperity.

The Kadamba dynasty was founded by Mayursarman, a learned brahman. It is said that he came to receive education at Kanchi, but he was insulted by some Pallava officials. To avenge his insult he took up military profession, defeated Pallava officials and then Pallavas recognised the independence of Mayursarman. The Kadambas ruled from Banavasi from A.D. 345 to 365. Kakusthavarman (A.D. 435-455) was the most powerful king and administrator of the dynasty. He extended his territory and established matrimonial relations with the Gangas and the Guptas. After his death, family split into two and one of the branches continued to rule from Banavasi and another from Triparvata. The ruler from Triparvata, Krishnavarma I, again united the family. But the Chalukyas of Badami defeated the Kadambas around A.D. 540 and annexed their kingdom.

In the southern Peninsula, three dynasties the Pallavas, Pandyas and the Cholas were the major powers. The Pallavas played an important role after the fall of Satavahanas from the third century until the rise of Cholas in the ninth century A.D. The origin of Pallava is under debate. The Pallava kings were divided into two groups, the early Pallavas and greater Pallavas. About the early Pallavas we have come to know from the Tamil and Sanskrit inscriptions. They performed sacrifices and ruled over a well organised territory that covered the northern part of the Peninsula extending from the eastern sea to the western sea. Simhavishnu was the famous king ruling in the sixth century A.D. He increased the influence and prestige of his family. His son and successor Mahendravarman I (A.D. 600-630) was a versatile genius. He was both a poet and a singer and composed a play *Mattavilas Prahasana* (the Delight of the Drunkards) in Sanskrit. In his time, the practice of scooping entire temples out of solid rock was introduced, of which the rathas of Mahabalipuram are fine examples. He was the contemporary of the Chalukya king, Pulakesin II and Harshavardhan of Kanauj. This period was marked with the clash between Pulakesin II and Harsha on the one hand and Pulakesin II and Mahendravarman I on the other, and in both Pulakesin II emerged victorious.

After deafeating Mahendravarman I he captured the northern provinces of his kingdom. Pulakesin II, in turn was defeated by Narsimhavarman, son and successor of Mahendravarman I, who

advanced as far as Badami and occupied it after a siege. After this victory Narasimhavarman adopted the tittle of *Vatapikonda*. He is also said to have defeated the Cholas, the Cheras, the Pandyas and the Kalabhrs. Narasimhavarman gave asylum to a Ceylonese prince, Manavarman, and sent two naval expeditions to Ceylon to help him to secure the throne of that country. He was one of the most powerful rulers of south India and raised the power and prestige of the Pallavas as far as Ceylon and South East Asia.

The reign of Narasimhavarman II (*c.* A.D. 695-722) was peaceful. It is known for remarkable architectural activities which initiated a particular style popularly known as the Dravidian style of temple architecture. The Pallava ruler also sent embassies to the Chinese emperor.

In the first half of the eighth century, the Pallavas faced attacks from the Chalukya king Vikramaditya II (A.D. 733-745) who is said to have overrun Kanchi thrice. The Pallavas also suffered severely from the attacks of the Pandyas and the Rashtrakutas during the reign of Dantivarman (around A.D. 796-840). Soon the power of the Pallavas began to decline due to these struggles and they were succeeded by the Cholas, destined to be the greatest imperial power in the south, whose influence and power was felt also by Ceylon and the South East Asian countries.

Exercises

1. Describe the emergence of Guptas up to the reign of Chandragupta I.
2. Describe the expansion of Gupta empire during Samudragupta's reign.
3. Discuss the personality of Samudragupta.
4. Discuss the achievements of Chandragupta II. Why was he known as Vikramaditya?
5. Discuss the causes for the decline of the Gupta empire.
6. Describe the political condition of India after Guptas.
7. Who were Pushyabhutis? Write about their political history.
8. Describe the personality of Harsha and his achievements.
9. Describe the political condition of south India after Satavahanas, up to the eighth century A.D.

10. Write short notes on:
    (i) Kumaragupta
    (ii) Pulakeshin II
    (iii) Mahendravarman
    (iv) Narshimahavarman
11. Discuss the Pallavas of Kanchi and Chalukyas of Badami and their political relationships.

Things to Do

- Draw a map of India and show the extent of the Gupta empire and locate important cities.
- Collect some literary works of Gupta period and read in the classroom.
- Collect material on the Nalanda University and photographs of its archaeological remains.
- Discuss the system of education imparted in the university in the classroom.
- On an outline map of India show the south Indian kingdoms with their capitals and other important places.
- Make a collage of the archaeological monuments of the period.

Chapter 19

Society, Economy and Culture from the Guptas to Harsha

Empires may rise and fall; and dynasties may appear and disappear on the sands of time. But when our attention turns away from these clashes of arms we find the splendours of time.

IN the previous chapter we had a glimpse of the fascinating panorama of events which unfolded during a span of five hundred years. Empires may rise and fall; and dynasties may appear and disappear on the sands of time. But when our attention turns away from these clashes of arms, we find the splendours of time. These splendours include the state of polity, religion, society, economic life, literature, art and architecture and technology.

Polity and Administration

The governments set up during this period were fairly well organised. This would be clear from the fact that notwithstanding the shocks of intermittent wars, and sometimes of disputed succession, the reigns of the Guptas, Chalukyas, and Pallavas lasted for about two hundred, four hundred and six hundred years respectively. In those days of slow means of communication it is remarkable indeed that they could hold together extensive territories for such long periods. The machinery of administration was more or less the same in all cases except that its parts or constituents varied with time or locality. The name of the functionaries might have changed but not their functions.

As before, the kingdom (*rajya*) was divided for administrative convenience into a number of provinces – *bhukti* in the north and *mandala or mandalam* in the south. The provinces in turn were sub-divided into divisions – *vishaya* or *bhoga* in north *Kottams* or *valanadu* in the south. The other units of administration in the descending scale were the districts – *adhisthana* or *pattana* in north and *nadu* in the south; groups of villages i.e. modern *tahsil* called *vithis* in north and *pattala* and *kurram* in south Indian records. The villages formed the lowest administrative units.

There existed a host of central, provincial and local officials to carry on the administration. The Guptas continued with the old bureaucratic form of administration, though it was more elaborately organised. The governor of *bhukti* called *uparika* was appointed by king. He, in turn appointed the officer in charge of a *vishaya* - known as *vishayapati*. Epigraphic records of the Gupta period have thrown interesting light on the functions of these *vishayapatis*. They had their headquarters in towns where they had their own officers and were aided in their administrative work by a Board of Advisors consisting of four members representing the various important sections, namely, (i) the *nagarsresthis* (chief of the guild of traders and bankers) represented the guilds in particular and the urban population in general (ii) *sarthavaha* (the head of guild of traders) represented the various trading communities, (iii) the *prathamakulika* (the chief of artisan) representing various artisan classes, (iv) the *prathamakayastha* (the chief scribe), who might have represented the Kayastha or government official like

the Chief Secretary of the present day. This body was known as *Adhisthanadhikarana.*

Similarly, each city had a council. The village came under the control of rural bodies consisting of a headman and the village elders. This period is characterised by a remarkable growth of the local self governing institutions such as the village committees and district committees. Their existence from a very early period has been noticed, hundreds of inscriptions and literature of this period from various parts of the country throw a flood of light on their nature and activities, and testify to the most wonderful organisation that the ancient Indians evolved. These types of village administrations still continue.

Two new classes of officers were introduced by the Guptas. These were *Sandhivigrahika* – the minister of peace and war i.e. modern foreign minister, and *Kumaramatyas* – a body of top ranking officials attached not only to the king but also to the crown-prince, and sometimes placed as in charge of districts. Another class of important officials were *Ayuktas*, probably the same as *Yuktas* mentioned in the Ashokan inscriptions and in Kautilya's *Arthasastra.* During the Gupta period we find the tittle *maha* prefixed to many known officials – such as *mahapratihara, mahabaladhikrita* and *mahadandanayaka* etc.

The powers of all these officials and officers emanated from the king who was helped by the crown-prince. The royal powers and prestige was undoubtedly on the increase. Gupta rulers assumed several titles such as *maharajadhiraja, parambhattaraka, parmesvara* etc. Samudragupta, for example, is described in Allahabad pillar inscription, not only equal to the Gods Indra, Varuna, Kuvera and Yama, but also as a 'God dwelling on the earth'. In the preceding period such titles were used by the rulers of foreign origin such as the Greeks, or the Kushanas but never by a king of an Indian origin. Guptas were the first among the Indians, who adopted such high sounding titles.

But old ideals of popular government are freely expressed in the literature of the period. The *Smritis* say that, "the ruler has been made by *Brahma* a servant of the people, getting his revenue as remuneration". The king was advised to rule with the help of ministers and to respect the decision of guilds and corporate bodies. It appears that royal powers were more circumscribed in the Gupta period and later during the Mauryas. Kings were advised to keep themselves in touch with the public through various agencies. Harsha maintained contact with public opinion both through his officers and by his own tours. This gave him an opportunity of supervising the administration also.

The numerical strength of the Gupta army is not known as we know about the army Chandragupta Maurya and Harsha. Evidence that the king maintained a standing army is confirmed from the conquests of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II.

The Gupta kings are described as excellent and unrivalled chariot warriors and horsemen and are usually represented on their coins.

The Gupta period provided a landmark in the history of the administration of law and justice in early India. It produced a rich corpus of legal literature, which reflects a distinct advance in the legal system. For the first time lawgivers of the period drew a clear line between civil and criminal law. The *Brihaspatismriti* enumerates eighteen titles of land and adds that fourteen of these have their origin in property (*dhanamula*) and four in injury (*himsamula*). On account of the growth of private property in land, which could be sold for money, we find detailed laws about partition, sale, mortgage and lease of land in law-books and in inscriptions of the period.

The list of taxes enumerated in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya is much bigger than that found in the Gupta inscriptions. This could suggest that the burden of taxation decreased in Gupta times because of the prosperity of the state. There is no trace of emergency taxes in this period. Land tax was collected varying from one-fourth to one-sixth of the produce, both in cash and kind. Various officers mentioned in the inscriptions kept proper records of assessment and collection of revenues, land transactions etc.

Language and Literature

The period marked the brilliant phase of Indian literature whether in poetry, drama, grammar or prose. The wonderful corpus of literature is the visible product of the system of education and learning. The *Puranas*, eighteen in number, preserved the traditions, legends, moral codes, religious and philosophical principles and *itihas*. The *smritis* are metrical texts containing the rules and regulations and laws for the guidance and governance of society. They are based on *dharmasutras* and *grihyasutras* of Vedic literature. But additions and alterations have been done to make them suitable to the changing conditions of society. They are written in verse. The phase of writing of commentaries on the *smritis* begins after the Gupta period.

The compilation of the two great epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* was completed by the fourth century A.D. The philosophical works of the period are many and varied in character such as philosophic works of *Mahayana* and other schools of Buddhist thoughts and those of various Saiva and Vaishnav school.

In the field of *kavya* or poetical works, the name of Kalidas stands foremost in the history of Indian literature. He is credited with having written the best works in poetry, dramma as well as in prose. His *kavyas* such as *Meghaduta, Raghuvamsa* and *Kumarasambhava*, and dramas such as *Abhijnashakuntalam* are considered to be among the best literary works in the world and have been translated into many languages. Kalidas graced the

court of Vikramaditya, the king of Ujjayini, who has been identified with Chandragupta II. A few inscriptions of the period also possess, in some degree, most of the characteristics features of Sanskrit *kavya*. The Allahabad pillar inscription by Harisena, Mandsor inscription composed by Vatsabhatti, Junagarh rock inscription, Mehrauli Pillar inscription, Aihole inscription by Ravikriti etc. are fine examples of literary expression.

In the field of drama, Bhasa, Sudraka, Kalidas and Bhavabhuti are the most noteworthy. Sudraka is the author of *Mrichchakatika* – 'Little clay cart'. His play deals with the love of a brahman with the beautiful daughter of a courtesan; it is considered one of the best plays of ancient India. Vishakhadatta wrote two plays: *Mudrarakshasa* and *Devichandraguptam*, which are the two best known historical plays. *Malavikagnimitram*, *Abhijnanashakuntalam* and *Vikramorvasiyam* the three famous plays written by Kalidas. Bhavabhuti's works are *Uttararama-charita*, *Malati-Madhava* etc.

In prose, earliest notable works are *Dasakumaracharita* by Dandin and *Vasavadatta* of Subandhu. One of the most famous works is *Panchatantra*, written by Vishnu Sharma, which was translated into Persian and Arabic in the eighth century A.D. and has been translated in almost all European languages since then. The popular work *Hitopadesa* is based on the *Panchatantra*. The biography of Harsha, *Harshacharita*, written by Banabhatta, is an outstanding work of the period.

This period also saw the development of Sanskrit grammar based on Panini and Patanjali. Mention may also be made of three *Shatakas* of Bhartrihari. He has also been credited for writing the commentary on the *Mahabhasya* of Patanjali. This period is particularly memorable for the compilation of the *Amarakosha* by Amarasimha, who was a luminary in the court of Chandragupta II. This lexicon is memorised by heart by the students who learn Sanskrit.

The Prakrit was as much popular in this period as it was earlier. The Svetambara Jain canon was written in Ardha-Magadhi Prakrit and religious texts of the Digambara Jains of the south were written in the Maharashtri and Sauraseni Prakrits. The commentaries on Buddhist texts were written in Pali. The well known Prakrit and Pali grammar works of the period are *Prakritaprakasha* written by Vararuchi and *Prakritalakshana* written by Chanda. The book on grammar of Pali is *Katyayanaprakarna*.

Tamil Literature

The Tamil literature of the period consists of large number of works resembling those of the Sangam Age. The development of devotional songs of the Saiva and Vaishnava saints are characterised alike by the depth and sincerity of feeling and the beauty of literary expression. Among the

Nayanar saints, Tirumular occupies a very high position. The hymns composed by them were collected into eleven *Tirmurais* which are held in great venerations by the people of India. Another important work contains the lives of sixty-three Saiva saints.

The Vaishnava saints known as *Alvars* are traditionally twelve in numbers. The collection of their works known as *Nalayiraprabandham*, consists of 4,000 stanzas. It is considered the most sacred text in Tamil and celebration of it in special festivals in all prominent temples of south India raised the status of Tamil as language of religious writing.

Foreign Accounts

Three great Chinese pilgrims Fa-Hien, Hiuen-Tsang and I-tsing visited India in search of knowledge, manuscripts and relics between the fifth and seventh centuries A.D. Fa-Hien with four other monks came to India during the reign of Chandragupta II. He came to India via central Asia, Kashmir and travelled all over north India. He stayed at Patliputra for three years, learning Sanskrit. As he was interested only in Buddhism, his report does not contain much political information, but he has given a general description of northern India at that time. His report gives an idea of general peace and welfare during Gupta period.

Hiuen-Tsang visited India during Harsha's reign. He spent thirteen years in India (A.D. 630-643), of which eight were in Harsha's kingdom. Like Fa-Hien, Hiuen- Tsang also came to India via central Asia. But unlike Fa-Hien, Hiuen-Tsang has left an account of his travels, giving details of the various Indian kingdoms visited by him. His book *Si-yu-ki* forms an invaluable source to ancient Indian history. He studied at Nalanda University, which was at that time one of the most famous and prestigious centers of education. He was honoured by Harshavardhana of Kanauj and Bhaskarvarma of Assam. He left India with 20 horses loaded with 657 Buddhist texts and 150 relics and spent the remaining years of his life in studying and translating Buddhist texts. Hiuen-Tsang played the most distinguished role in establishing Buddhism on a solid footing in China and improving the cultural relations between the two countries.

The example of Hiuen-Tsang inspired Chinese monks to visit India in large numbers. Chinese texts have preserved the biographies of sixty monks who visited India during the second half of the seventh century A.D. The greatest among these later pilgrims was I-tsing. He came to India via sea route spending several years in Sumatra and Sri Vijaya learning Buddhism. He stayed at Nalanda for ten years studying and translating Buddhist texts and returned to China with a collection of 400 Sanskrit manuscripts. He translated a number of texts and compiled a Sanskrit-Chinese dictionary. In his book entitled, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archepelago*, he gives detail account of

Buddhism and general condition of the two countries.

Economic Condition

It has been shown in the preceding chapters that long before the rise of the imperial Guptas, India had developed an advanced system of agriculture, industry and trade. This economic stability and prosperity provided the basis for the all round cultural progress made during this period.

The agriculture system was well developed during this period. Scientific methods were followed for better and more agricultural production. The *Brihat Samhita* and the *Amarakosha* contain special chapters on the study of plants and gardens, forest, crops and manure etc.

The various branches of industry were maintained at the same high level as in the earlier period, because of abundance of raw materials and the skill and enterprise of the artisans and the craftsmen. Literary works mention a large variety of clothing materials. These consists of cotton, silk, wool and linen. Hiuen-Tsang classifies the clothing material of Indians under the heads – silk, cotton, linen, wool and goat hair. *Amarakosha* mentions different terms in use for the finer and coarser varieties of cloth as well as for unbleached and bleached silk and the like. Ajanta frescos also revealed different techniques of weaving. Dashapura, Banaras, Mathura, and Kamarupa were great centres of textiles production. The Mandsor inscription gives details about the guilds of silk weaver, and corporate activities of the period. Ivory work flourished as earlier. We come to know about the guilds of ivory workers from a seal found in the excavation at Bhita. Leather industry also flourished. We see the depiction of leather boots and shoes in the contempary sculptures and paintings. The art of the jeweller seems to have been in the same advanced condition as in the preceding period. The *Brihat Samhita* mentions no less than twenty-two jewels. *Ratna pariksha*, the science of testing gems, was included by Vatsyayana in his *Kamasutra* as one of the sixty-four arts. Literary evidence as well as foreign accounts of the period prove that jewels were used at this period for a large variety of purposes.

As in the earlier centuries, technical sciences were utilised for the manufacture of metals. Vatsyayana mentions *Ruparatnapariksha, dhatuveda* and *maniragakarajnanam* i.e. testing of precious stones, the smelting of metals and the technology of jewels and so forth. According to Hiuen-Tsang's testimony, brass, gold and silver were produced in abundance. The Gupta period's gold and silver coins, seals, the Mehrauli iron pillar, a few statues belonging to this period are the best examples of metal workmanships.

Ship building was another big industry which was well developed in the period that facilitated trade and communication activities.

Large number of guilds flourished in the period. The elaborate laws of partnership, contract, constitution of

guild and right and duties of the individual members are mentioned in detail in *smritis* and corroborated by contemporary literature and inscriptions.

During this period, various guilds activitely participated in the administration of city, as seals and inscriptions mention the legends *Sreshthi-kulika-nigama* and *sreshthi-sarthavaha-kulika-nigama*. The inscriptions of the Gupta and of the later periods record the endowments by princes and other individuals deposited with the guilds for regular payments to be made to people concerned for the performance of acts of piety and charity.

These permanent endowments show the function of the guilds in the capacity of banks as well as confirm their stable position in terms of business stability. This in turn generated faith in the people to invest their money safely in the guilds.

Public works were undertaken and executed by the state as well as guilds. Reference may specially be made to the repairs of, the dam on Sudarshana lake and the connected irrigation canal, carried out in the province of Saurashtra, under the rule of Skandagupta provincial governor Parnadatta and his son Chakrapalita. Other works included measures taken to improve public health, construction of roads and bridges, improvement of communication, setting up of big and small industries and working of mines. There were also other numerous endowments of various public welfare activities such as education.

Trade and commerce flourished during the entire period. Trade was carried on between India on the one hand and eastern and western countries on the other, both through land as well as coastal routes.

During this period, India maintained regular maritime relation with Sri Lanka, Persia, Arabia, Byzantine Empire, Africa and further west. In the eastern part, India developed commercial relations with China, Burma, and South East Asia.

The important trade items were silk, spices of various kind, textiles metals, ivory, sea produce etc. Tamralipti, Arikamedu, Kaveri-pattnam, Barbaricum, Muziris, Pratishthana, Sopara and Brighu-kachchha were the important sea ports of the time. These were well connected through inland routes from all parts of India.

The highly flourishing trade and commerce made the country enormously wealthy and the reputation of the riches of India spread far and wide. In the beginning of the fifth century the people of the 'Middle Kingdom', according to Fa-Hien, were prosperous and happy. Hiuen-Tsang gives a similar account of peace and plenty in India. He says that 'the rare and valuable products of distant regions are stored here in great quantities'. Description of the city, dwelling houses, luxurious items, ornaments and wealth etc. in literary accounts prove the high standard of living and the luxury of town life.

However, some historians feel that with the Guptas began the rise of feudalism in India. For this they cite the evidence of land grants given to brahmans, temples, viharas, mathas and other institutions. According to those who subscribe to this view, these land grants gave rise to the emergence of landed intermediaries and feudal lords, whose position can be equated to the feudal lands in Europe. These scholars also believe that there was a general decline in the industries, trade and commerce and coins became rare. All these factors weakened the economy and the state, and gave rise to feudalism in India, as in Europe.

But, as we have seen above, the decline in industries, trade and commerce does not seem to be the fact. We have seen the evidence of trading relations with various countries for which enormous amount of literary evidence exist in the Indian, Chinese and Arab sources. There was prosperity all around.

There was no decline in the urban and commercial centres nor any paucity of coins. Some historians have made a detailed study of inscriptions dealing with the land grants given by several dynasties. They have made a quantitative study of the areas given in the land grant in relation to the total land area of the kingdom. The study shows that the total area given in land grant is between 0.017% and 0.026% of the total land area of the kingdom.

Further, in Europe, to which India has been compared, the reciever of land – (fief) grants had to provide military service, annual gifts, financial help, etc. to the king and also had to regularly attend to the court of the king. This was not the case in India. First it was not a land grant given in the European sense. Infact, the *donee* had no obligation towards the doner except to use the grant for the purpose it was given.

The land grants given to various charitable institutions and the brahmans to run the educational institutions etc. were hardly enough to meet the regular and essential expenditure. The area of the land grant and the income therefore was so little that it would have hardly been ever noticed by the state. Therefore, many historians rightly think that these land grants meant for charitable purposes should not be compared with the feudal grants in Europe. The tradition of land grant for charitable purposes continued into the medieval period also. These were known as *madad-i-mash, suyarghal, milk* and *Idarar.* In fact in the medival period the total expenditure under these heads went upto 5% of the total income of the state.

Religions

The development and spread of religions like Buddhism, Jainism, and Brahmanism to foreign countries testify the high degree of maturity in the mother country. Although the Guptas, Chalukyas, Pallavas and others were followers of Brahmanism they never imposed their religion as the official religion of the empire. They encouraged equally the promotion of all religions, including Buddhism and Jainism,

Buddhism

Sanchi, Sarnath, Gaya, Nalanda continued to be the great centres of Buddhism. Buddhism became much popular not only in India but in China, Ceylon and South East Asia. A large number of pilgrims and students from these countries came to India to study Buddhism during this period. Some of the most famous ones are Fa-Hien, Hiuen-Tsang and I-tsing. All of them mention in detail the flourishing condition of Buddhism and recount things such as number of monasteries, number of students in these monasteries etc. The King of Ceylon requested Samudragupta to build a rest house for Buddhist pilgrims at Gaya. A large number of chaityas, stupas and viharas were built during this period. Nalanda, Valabhi and Kanchipuram became important centres of education. During this period Buddhism assimilated several features of Brahmanism, and Brahmanism imbibed some of the essential teachings of Buddhism.

Fig. 19.1 *Jain Trithankara*

Jainism

Jainism made considerable progress during this period. Some of the Chalukyas, Rashtrakuta, Ganga and Kadamba kings patronised the Jain religion. It continued to be popular among the merchant communities of western India. In the sixth century A.D. the second Jaina Council was held at Valabhi and Jain canon was defined substantially as it exists today.

Hinduism

Buddhism and Jainism both either discarded, or passed over in silence, the doctrine of the existence of God. But within the Vedic religion there grew certain religious system which attained considerable popularity within a short time. This system now centered around the idea of a supreme God conceived as Vishnu, Siva, Sakti and some other form. Salvation was possible through His Grace (*prasada*) alone and this could be attained only by *bhakti* i.e. intense love and devotion leading to complete surrender of self to the personal God. The chief vehicle of this new system were Bhagavatism, (later came to be known as Vaishnavism), Saivism and Saktism.

The three important aspects of Vedic religion became crystallised at this time. The images of gods and goddesses emerged as the centre of worship and greater stress now began to be laid on *dana* (gifts) than on *yajnas* (sacrifices) although offering to the images remained central to the ritual. This in turn encouraged *bhakti* (devotion) where worship of a god became much more the concern of the individual. They expressed themselves by defining the four ends of life known as *Purshartha* – religious and the social laws (*dharma*), economic well being (*artha*), pleasure (*kama*), and the salvation of the soul (*moksha*).

Fig. 19.2 *Depiction of Varahavatar at Udaygiri*

Vaishnavism

Vaishnavism, as the name implies, means religion in which Vishnu is the object of worship and devotion as the Supreme God. Originally, it merely laid stress upon the idea of a supreme God, God of Gods, called Hari, and emphasised the necessity of worshipping him with devotion, in preference to other older methods of sacrifices and austerities. It did not, of course, do away with either the sacrifice or Vedic literature which prescribed it. It therefore, can be said that this new system made an attempt to introduce a religious reform on more conservative principles than Buddhism and Jainism did.

The Vaishnavism centered around the *Vasudeva* cult of Bhagavata religion where Vasudeva Krishna is identified with the Vedic diety Vishnu.

An important feature of Vaishnavism during this period was the popular worship of *avataras* i.e., incarnations of Vishnu. It was believed that whenever the social order faced crisis, Vishnu appeared in an appropriate form to save the earth and humanity. Epigraphic and literary records of the period throw light on the evolution of the *avataras*, the roots of this can be traced to the later Vedic literature.

The number and nature of these *avataras* are variously given in different treatises. Gradually, the concept of ten *avataras* became more popular. Through these *avataras* we find the biological as well as historical evolution of life on earth. These are *Matsya* (fish), *Kurma* (tortoise), *Varah* (Boar), *Narasimha* (man-lion), *Vaman* (dwarf), *Parasurama* (Rama with the axe), *Rama* (King of Ayodhya and hero of the *Ramayana*), *Krishna* (Hero of the *Mahabharata*), *Buddha* (the Enlightened one) and *Kalki* (to appear). Of these, Krishna was the most popular

incarnation of Vishnu because several aspects of Krishna's life occupy an important position in modern Vaishnavism.

Another feature of Vaishnavism in this period is the conception of Lakshmi or Sri as Vishnu's wife. Goddess Lakshmi is associated with prosperity. The Gupta kings were followers of Vaishnavism and called themselves *paramabhagavatas*. As worshippers of Vishnu, the Gupta emperors introduced the depiction of his *vahana*, Garuda, Goddess Lakshmi, and *chakra* on their coins.

In south India, Vaishnavism became quite popular and the Vaishnava devotees were known as *Alvars*. Their Tamil songs are so marked by depth of feeling and true piety that they are looked upon as Vaishnava *Veda*. These songs are very popular in south India, and their authors are held in great veneration. Their images are worshipped side by side with those of Vishnu and his various incarnations.

Saivism

The origin of Saivism may be traced to the conception of Rudra in the *RigVeda*. The worship of the Siva-linga in Harappan civilization also point to the great antiquity of Saivism. Rudra represented the malignant and destructive phenomena in nature. We can trace the development of the worship of Rudra right from the RigVedic times to the period of *Upanishad*. *Kena Upanishad* eulogised Siva and his consort Uma as supreme deities.

Siva was at first worshipped, not by a particular sect, but by the Vedic people in general. The existence of the Saiva sect may be traced as early as the second century B.C. It is possible that a definite Saiva system or school was established, in imitation of the Bhagvata sect. Saiva sect was earlier known as Lakula, Pasupata or Mahesvara.

The worship of Siva as a sect seems to have spread rapidly after the Kushana period. By about the sixth century A.D. Saivism became more popular and spread to south India and became the predominant religion in Anman and Cambodia from fifth century onwards. In the first half of the seventh century A.D. Hiuen-Tsang found followers of Saiva sect as far west as Baluchistan.

In south India a large number of saints, called *Nayanars*, composed their devotional hymns with the highest spiritual sentiments and set up Saivism on a strong foundation. The number of these saints is usually given as 63 and their hymns are still widely read and held in great veneration.

Lingayata was another important sect of Saivism in south India, whose philosophy was influenced both by Sankara and Ramanuja. The Lingayatas gave prominence to the worship of *Linga* (Phallus) and the *Nandi* (Bull).

The Saiva sect became very popular in the south under the patronage of the Rashtrakutas and the Cholas and the magnificent temples and monastic establishment still testify its former

grandeur. The Buddhist kings of Pala dynasty established Saiva temples for the Pasupata sects.

The other sects that became popular during this period are Saktism, Kartikeya and Ganapati.

Mother Goddesses have been worshiped in India right from pre-historic periods onwards. During the Gupta period, the Goddesses Durga, Kali, and Parvati were associated with the *Sakti,* as the strength or potency of her male counterpart. These goddesses were worshipped as wives of gods and played an active and positive role in the life of human beings in their benevolent aspects such as Lakshmi, Annapurna, and Saraswati. *Ardhanarisvara*, a figure, half Siva and half Parvati, representing the union of the God with his sakti, was an important development of this period. The Siva and Sakti were worshipped in benign as well as terrible forms.

The numerous solar deities of the *Vedas* were merged into a single God usually known as *surya* (the sun). Several temples in northern and western India were built during this period dedicated to the Sun God. The Mandsor inscription of the time of Kumaragupta I mentions the construction and repair of Sun Temple by the guild of weavers.

In the epic and puranic mythology, Kartikeya and Ganapati are usually described as the two sons of Siva and Parvati. Kartikeya was the war-God known as Kumara, Skanda, and Subramanya. Ganapati or Ganessa is venerated and worshipped first among the Gods by every Hindu. He is considered as Vighnaharta (remover of all obstacles).

Art and Architecture

The economic prosperity of the country led to the all round development in the field of sculptural art, architecture and painting. The manuals on the construction of stone temples were written during this period giving minute details of construction which were faithfully followed by the craftsmen.

Caves continued to be excavated during the Gupta and the post Gupta period. In the Deccan, some of the finest rock-cut caves were excavated. There are nine caves at Udaygiri near Vidisa. These are partly rock-cut and partly

Fig. 19.3 *Bhitargaon Temple*

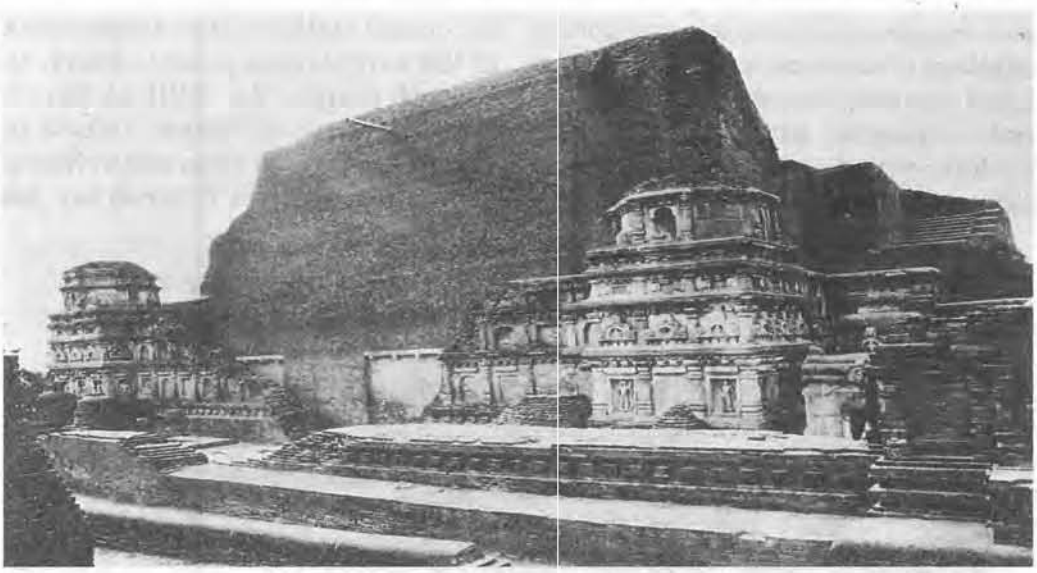


Fig. 19.4 *Remains of the Great Stupa at Nalanda*

stone-built. The caves exhibit a gradual advance in the design showing combined features of the rock-cut and structural design. The caves at Ajanta retaining the essential features of old, present an altogether new line of architecture by the great beauty of their pillars of varied design and size and the fine paintings with which the inner wall and ceiling are decorated. Another group, is the series of caves at Bagh, though simple in architecture, but are famous for their paintings. Another notable group of rock-cut monasteries and chaitya halls are those of Ellora. The Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain caves show the final phase of development. For the Kailash temple, a block of hill side was cut off, and was carved into a magnificent monolithic temple with a spacious hall and finely carved pillars. At Mamallapuram, number of pillared halls and the seven monolithic temples popularly called *rathas* were carved by the Pallava kings, Mahendravarman and Narasimhavarman in the seventh century A.D. The *rathas* are the culmination of complete reproduction of massive structural temples cut out of rock.

Monasteries and stupas were also built during this period. The monastic institutions which were also the centres of education, attained vast proportions consisting of large aggregations of various kinds of building grouped together. The famous centres were at Bodhgaya, Sarnatha, Kusinagara, Sravasti, Kanchi and Nalanda. The Nalanda University grew into a most prestigious establishment from about the fifth century A.D. Hiuen-Tsang describes in detail the

great temples, monasteries, and library buildings of Nalanda mahavihara. The period also saw the ushering in of a new epoch connected with the growth and development of structural temples of distinctive forms and styles. Small, flat-roofed platforms are characteristics of the early Gupta period. Small, but elegant temple No. XVII at Sanchi, Kankali temple at Tigawa, Vishnu and Varaha Temples at Eran and at Nachna Kuthara in Madhya Pradesh are good

Fig. 19.5 *(a) The Rathas at Mamallapuram*

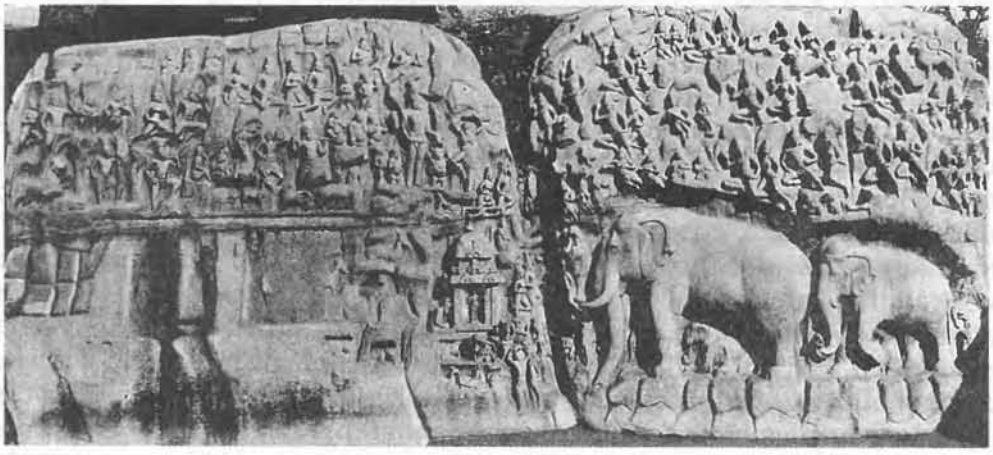


Fig. 19.5 *(b) Carving on the Rathas*

Fig. 19.6 *Deogarh Temple*

Fig. 19.7 *Shore Temple at Mamallapuram*

examples of early temple architecture. Gradually, these temples developed a *shikhara* on the roof which came to be adopted all over the country. Two best examples of this type are the brick temple Bhitargaon in Kanpur and the *Dasavatara* temple at Deogarh, both in the Uttar Pradesh.

The shape of *shikhara* i.e., the superstructure above the sanctum-sanctorum containing the images of deities marked the development of two distinctive style viz., northern Indian style (*Nagar* style) and south Indian style (*Dravidian* style). At Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal we find temples of both styles.

Fig. 19.8 *Dharamachakra Pravartana Mudra of Buddha from Sarnath*

The earliest examples of Dravidian style temple is the rock-cut temple known as Dharmaraja *ratha* at Mamallapuram and structural temples at Kanchi, known as Kailasanatha and Vaikuntha Perumal, all built by the Pallava Kings.

Sculptures

In the domain of sculpture, the Gupta period witnessed the highest development of art in India. The period is known as the "classical period" because it saw the culmination of spirituality, idealism and art into one.

The figures of Buddha, found in large numbers at Sarnath and other places, show a fully developed form of Buddhist art and came to be regarded as the model for succeeding ages. They exhibit at once, grace and refinement as well as delicacy and repose, and offers a unique combination of perfection in technique with the expression of the highest spiritual conception which makes them masterpieces.

This high quality was generally maintained in the images of Brahmanical gods also as is illustrated by the images of Siva, Vishnu and others in the sculptured panels of the Deogarh temples and other places. These divine images not only possess beauty and charm, but are also beaming with a radiant spiritual expression.

Fig. 19.9 *Cave 19 at Ajanta*

The Gupta artists and craftsmen were no less capable in working with metals. The famous iron pillar at Delhi, near Qutub Minar, is a marvel in metallurgical skill and technology. The art of casting copper statues, coins, and copper seals etc, on a large scale shows the handling of metal work at its best. A copper image of Buddha, about 80 feet high was erected at Nalanda in Bihar, and a fine Sultanganj Buddha, 7½ feet high, can still be seen in Birmingham Museum. Coins were finely struck and dies were carefully engraved. Seals attached to copper-plates are also examples of fine workmanship.

Paintings

The tradition of paintings in India can be traced from prehistoric rock art painting found at Bhimbetaka, Mirzapur and various other sites. Literary evidence also leaves no doubt that the art of painting was cultivated in India from very remote times. The paintings were used for the decoration of walls. The best examples of paintings in India in Ajanta and Bagh caves were done between the first and the seventh century A.D. At Ajanta of the 29 caves traces of paintings can be seen in sixteen caves. In Ajanta the surface of the caves were first covered by a mixture of clay, cowdung,

Fig. 19.10 *Sheshashayee Vishnu, Vishnu temple Deograh*

fine pulverised traprock, and then a thin coating of fine white plaster. The ground thus prepared was carefully smoothened and kept moistened. This produced a surface on which the design was first sketched and then painted.

Fig. 19.11 *Durga Temple at Aihole*

The usual colours used are white, red, brown, green and blue in various shades. The pictures depict figures of Buddha and various episodes of his present and past lives i.e., Jataka stories. Animals and vegetables are is drawn in profusion for the sake of ornamentalion . The designs are as varied and graceful as they are fanciful.

The painting on the rock-cut temple at Kailasa and the adjoining caves contain paintings of a somewhat different type and style from those of Ajanta and Bagh.

The cave temple of Sittannavasal in Pudukottai (Madras) contains some fine paintings of the time of the Pallava king Mahendravarman. They are elegant and beautiful, and show the degree of excellence which the art had attained during Pallava era.

Fig. 19.12 *Paintings in Ajanta Cave*

Science and Technology

In the field of mathematics, astronomy and medicine, India had much advanced knowledge during this period in comparison to any other country in the world. These developments in science and technology in India were first borrowed by Arabs and then by the western world.

In Ancient India, mathematics and astronomy originated and developed in Vedic times itself. In mathematics, Aryabhata wrote the book *Aryabhattiya*, in Kusumpura (Pataliputra) when he was 23 years old. *Aryabhattiya* is divided into four parts. As regards geometry, Aryabhata considers among other topics, an area of a triangle, the theorem on similarity of triangles, the area of circle and the theorem relating to rectangles contained by the segments.

One of the most important features of Aryabhata's mathematical system is his unique system of notation. It is based on the decimal place-value system, unknown to other ancient people, but now in use throughout the civilized world. The other famous mathematician was Brahmagupta who wrote *Brahmsiddhanta* in *c.* A.D. 628 His other well known work was *Khandakhadya* probably composed in A.D. 665. He developed rules for operating with negative qualities and with zero. He began to apply Algebra to astronomical problems.

Astronomy

Astronomy and Astrology are included in ancient India in a term known as *Jyotisa*. Varahamihira, who flourished in the court of Chandragupta II, has preserved in his *Panchasiddhantika*, written in A.D. 505, the accounts of five astronomical works which were evidently regarded as authority in his own time. These five works or *siddhantas* are known as *Paitamaha, Romaka, Paulisa, Vasishtha* and *Surya*. The *Suryasiddhanta* is the most important and complete work on the astronomy of the period. In the field of astrology, we are also much indebted to Varahamihira. He has, in his encyclopaedic work *Brihatsamhita*, preserved a considerable amount of ancient knowledge on the subject. His *Brihatsamhita*, besides being the most important textbook on natural astrology, is a veritable compendium of Ancient Indian learning in the field of science. Varahamihira's son, Prithuyashas too was an ardent student of astronomy, and wrote, in about A.D. 600, a work called *Harashatpanchashika*.

As in mathematics, so too in astronomy, Aryabhata was an outstanding scholar of the Gupta age. His most original contribution was however, that the eclipses were not the work of *Rahu*, as believed by some astrologers, but caused by the shadow of the earth falling on the moon, therefore, asserting the movement of earth on its own axis around the sun, as was known in Vedic times. Aryabhata was the first to utilize sign functions in astronomy. He discovered an accurate formula to measure the decrease or increase in the duration of two consecutive days.

Medicine

Ayurveda, the name of Indian medical sciences, literally means science of longevity. Its origin dates back to Vedic times. Over seven hundred hymns in the *Vedas* particularly in *Atharvaveda* refer to the topics connected with *Ayurveda.* The great writer of this period is Vagabhata, who ranks only next to Charaka and Susruta. The two famous works of the period are *Astanga-sangraha* and the *Astanga-hirdaya-samhita* assigned to two different authors by the same name i.e., Vagabhata. There were also treatises on the diseases of animals. The best known is *Hastyayurveda.* It deals elaborately with the diseases peculiar to elephants. A similar treatise on the horse known as *Asvasastra* was written by sage Salihotra.

Metallurgy

Another science which developed along with medicine is chemistry. Nagarjuna, the great Mahayanist, is reputed to have distinguished himself also in chemistry. Besides medicine, chemistry must have substantially helped in the development of metallurgy. The Mehrauli iron pillar remains a living monument that shows the progress in metallurgy achieved 1500 years ago by Indians. This is 7.32 meters high with a diameter of 40 cm at the base to 30 cm. at the top and weigh about 6 tonnes. It has withstood all the vagar ies of nature such as rains, heat and cold for over all these 1500 years without rusting.

Fig. 19.13 *Iron Pillar at Mehrauli*

Exercises

1. Explain the following:
   bhukti, Vishaya, Adhisthanadhikarana, bhakti, Nayanaras, Alvars, Sresthi, Sarthavaha, Kulika, Nigama, Avatars.
2. Describe the administrative system during the Gupta period.
3. Describe the city administration during the Gupta period. In what aspect did it differ from the administrative system of the Mauryan period?
4. Describe the literary trends of the period with special reference to works complied during this period both in Tamil and Sanskrit.
5. Write about the Chinese travellers who came to India during this period.
6. Describe the developments in Buddhism and Jainism during this period.
7. Describe the evolution of Vaishnavism and Saivism.
8. Write about the economic conditions during this period with special reference to trade and commerce.
9. Write about the development in the field of art, architecture and painting during this period.
10. Describe the achievements in the field of science, mathematics and metallurgy.

Things to Do

- Make a project on the art and architecture of the period.
- Read any literary work of the period.
- On an outline map of India show the important cities of the period.
- Visit the museums and collect pictures of different coins and sculptures and identify them.

CHAPTER 20

INDIA AFTER HARSHA

THE close interaction among the various regions of India led to the crystallisation of common cultural trends, seen in the literature, education, art and architecture of the period, which are visible even after several ups and downs in the succeeding centuries.

THE period after the death of Harsha in the mid seventh century A.D. and the establishment of Delhi Sultanate in the twelfth century A.D. covers a span of 600 years. These six centuries witnessed some important events such as –

(i) The rise of important kingdoms in eastern, central and southern India which were as important as north Indian kingdoms during this period. Some of them were not only the powerful kingdoms of the time, but also acted as a bridge between north and south.

(ii) The cultural traditions of these kingdoms remained stable even though they often fought among themselves.

(iii) There remained a continuity in the field of economy, social structure, ideas and beliefs. This was perhaps because the changes in these areas take place more gradually than the changes in political structure. The close interaction among the various regions of India led to the crystallisation of common cultural trends, seen in the literature, education, and art and architecture of the period and are still visible even after several ups and downs in the succeeding centuries.

(iv) The spread of Muslim rule over the major part of northern India at the end of twelfth century.

Since the days of Maukharis, Kanauj became the seat of power in north India – a position which Pataliputra (Patna) enjoyed before and Delhi was to enjoy afterwards. Hiuen-Tsang described Kanauj as a flourishing centre of Buddhism along with Hinduism. Kanauj was then a well-fortified city, extending about four miles on the bank of the Ganges.

After the death of Harsha in A.D. 647, Kanauj lost its status as the capital city briefly. But in the beginning of the eighth century A.D. Kanauj came back as the centre of power with a very powerful king, Yashovarman. He ruled over a vast empire which included almost the whole of northern India. His victory over Bengal formed the subject of the famous kavya *Gaudavaho* by Vakpatiraja, a court poet. Yashovarman was a famous king who sent an embassy to China in A.D. 731. Famous dramatist Bhavabhuti, the author of *Malati-Madhava, Uttara Rama-charita* and *Mahavira-charita* adorned his court. Yashovarman ruled till about A.D. 740. Nothing is known about the successor of Yashovarman, though it is known that four kings ruled Kanauj between A.D. 740-810. Kanauj from the sixth century A.D. till it finally fell to Mohammad Ghori in A.D.1194 played an important role in history of the north India and enjoyed a status of not only a political centre but also a cultural centre.

Gurjara Pratiharas

The early history of Gurjara Pratiharas is shrouded in mystery. Some historians believe that they came to India from the central Asian region after the Gupta period and settled in Rajasthan. Gradually they gained political importance. However, the

bardic tradition of Rajasthan claims that the Gurjara Pratiharas were born out of a *yajna* done at Mount Abu. Others born out of this *yajna* were Chalukyas, Parmaras and Chahmanas. It is for this reason that these four dynasties are also known as *agnikulas* (fire-clans). It is further said that these four dynasties of Rajputs were created for the protection of the country from external aggressions. This has been taken by some scholars to suggest that they were foreigners who were given status in Indian society. The Pratiharas claim that they were called Pratihara (literary means door keeper) because their ancestor Lakshmana served as a door keeper to his brother Rama. The geographical name of Gujarat is derived from Gurjara.

The early history of the family is preserved in the Gwalior inscription of Bhoja, the seventh and the most famous king of the dynasty. Nagabhatta I was the real founder of the fame of family. He defeated the muslim forces from the Arabs. After him, Vatsaraja (A.D. 775-800) followed an aggressive imperial policy which brought him into conflicts with Pala kings of Bengal. Vatsaraja defeated Pala king Dharmapala but unfortunately the fruits of his victory were snatched away from him by the Rashtrakuta king Dhruva, who defeated Vatsaraja. Dharamapala took advantage of the reverses of Vatsaraja and installed his own nominee Chakrayudha on the throne of Kanauj. Nagabhatta II (A.D.815), son of Vatsaraja made an alliance with several other states particularly with Andhra, Vidharbha and Kalinga. He made extensive preparation and fought against his rivals. He first defeated Chakrayudha and captured Kanauj. Then, he defeated Dharamapala and fought with Rashtrakuta king, Govinda III. It is also believed that Nagabhatta defeated Sultan Vega who was the son of the governor of Sind under the Caliph-Al-Mamun.

Nagabhatta II was succeeded by his son Ramabhadra during whose brief reign of three years, the Pratihara suffered most owing to the aggressive policy of the Pala king, Devapala. Bhoja I, succeeded his father Ramabhadra, about A.D. 836. Within a few years of his accession, Bhoja I succeeded in restoring the falling fortunes of his dynasty. The death of Devapala followed by the Rashtrakuta's invasion of Bengal must have provided a golden opportunity to the Pratihara king. Fortune also favoured Bhoja I in another direction. The Rashtrakuta king, Krishna II was involved in a life and death struggle with the Eastern Chalukyas. Bhoja I defeated Krishna II and captured the region of Malwa and Gujarat. After asserting triumph over the two great rivals, Bhoja I had no difficulty in establishing his sovereignty over the Punjab, Avadh and other territories of north India and consolidated his empire.

The name of Bhoja is famous in many legends. He was a devotee of Vishnu, and adopted the title of *Adivaraha*, which has been inscribed in some of his coins. He is also known

by other names as 'Mihir', 'Prabhasa' etc. An assessment of Bhoja as a conqueror and administrator is given by the Arab historians Sulaiman around A.D. 851. He wrote that Bhoja maintained numerous forces and no other Indian king had such fine cavalry. He has got riches and his camels and horses are numerous. Exchanges are carried on in his states with silver and gold. There is no other country in India more safe from robbers.

Bhoja I was succeeded by his son Mahendrapala I about A.D. 885. Mahendrapala I not only kept the vast empire intact but even probably extended his boundaries. The Pratihara empire now stretched almost from the Himalayas in the north to the Vindhyas in the south and from Bengal in the east to Gujarat in the west. He was also known as 'Mahendrayudha', and 'Nirbhayanarendra'. He was a liberal patron of learned men. His guru Rajashekhara,occupies a distinguished place in the Indian literature. His works include *Karpuramanjari, Bala-Ramayana, Bala Bharata, Kavyamimansa, Bhuvana Kosha* and *Haravilasa.*

The Pratiharas dominated north India for over two hundred years from the eighth century to the tenth century A.D. Al-Masudi, a native of Baghdad, who visited India in A.D. 915-916 testified to the great powers and prestige of the Pratihara rulers and the vastness of their empire. He says that empire of Al-Juzr (Gurjara) had 1,800,000 villages, the cities and rural areas were about 2000 km. in length and 2000 km. in breadth. The King's army had four divisions, each consisting of 7,00,000 to 9,00,000 men. There is no doubt that these figures are a bit exagerated but this shows that Pratihara empire was fairly large and a powerful one.

Between A.D. 915 and A.D. 918, the Rashtrakuta king, Indra II again attacked Kanauj leaving it totally devastated. This weakened the Pratihara empire. Another Rashtrakuta ruler, Krishna III, invaded north India in about A.D. 963 and defeated the Pratihara rulers. This was followed by the decline of Pratihara empire.

The Pratiharas were patrons of learning and literature. The Sanskrit poet Rajashekhar lived at the court of Mahendrapala I. The Pratihara kings were followers of Hinduism. They embellished Kanauj with many fine buildings and temples. It is interesting to note from the epigraphic records that the building of temples and the educational institutions attached with them, formed community projects, in which the entire village community participated. The upkeep of the temples and educational institutions was the concern of the entire community. For this purpose they made contributions both in cash and kind, irrespective of their professions.

During this period, many Indian scholars went along with embassies to the court of the Caliph at Baghdad. We do not know the names of the Indian kings who sent these embassies. Several Arab travellers and scholars also visited India. This interaction between India

and Arab led to the spread of Indian culture, literature and science, especially mathematics, algebra and medicine to the Arab world from where these were further transmitted to Europe.

The Pratiharas were well known for their hostility to the Arab rulers of Sindh. Despite this, it seems that the movement of scholars and trade between India and west Asia remained uninterrupted.

Palas

The history of Bengal from the death of Harsha up to the ascendancy of the Palas remains in obscure. At this time West Bengal was known as Gauda and East Bengal as Vanga. Bengal was subject to internal disorder, which has been termed as *matsyanyaya* (the rule of strong devouring the weak). This lead to a revolution in which Gopala was elected king by the people to end this *matsyanyaya*. The details of Gopala's early career are not known. However, he introduced peace in the kingdom and laid the foundation for the great future for his family known as the Pala dynasty.

Gopala was succeeded by his son, Dharmapala about A.D. 780. He was an energetic personality, and found himself in a position to undertake the expansion of his empire. He defeated Indrayudha, the king of Kanauj and installed Chakrayudha to the throne of Kanauj. Dharmapala held a grand darbar at Kanauj which was attended by several kings. But he could not consolidate his position. Rashtrakuta king, Dhruva could not tolerate the imperial pretensions of Dharmapala, and routed him in a battle. Meanwhile the Pratihara power revived under Nagabhatta II. Dhruva defeated Dharmapala near Monghyr.

Dharamapala was succeeded by his son Devapala who is rightly reckoned as the most mighty Pala king. Epigraphic records credit him with extensive conquests. He conquered Pragjotishpur (Assam) and Utkala (Orissa). The Palas ruled over Bihar, Bengal and parts of Orissa and Assam with many vicissitudes of fortune for over four centuries. Their power is attested by the Arab merchant Sulaiman. He calls the Pala kingdom Ruhma (or Dharma), short for Dharmapala, and says that the Pala rulers were at war with their neighbours — the Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas, but his troops were more numerous than his adversaries. He tells us that 'it was customary for the Pala king to be accompanied by a force of 50,000 elephants'.

Besides the inscriptions and the Arab travellers, detailed information about the Palas is also provided to us by the Tibetan chronicles. According to Tibetan historians, Pala rulers were great patrons of Buddhist learning and religion. Dharmapala founded the famous Buddhist monastery at Vikramashila, which became second only to Nalanda in fame. Its splendid temples and monasteries bear eloquent testimony to his liberality as well as to that of other donors.

During Pala's time, the fame of Nalanda University spread all over the

world. During this time Nalanda had more than 10,000 students and teachers, coming not only from different parts of India but also from central Asia, China, South East Asia and Sri Lanka. It was considered as one of the biggest educational institution of its time. The University imparted education in various branches of knowledge. To meet the expenses of this huge establishment, Dharmapala donated the royal income from two hundred surrounding villages. Devapala also donated income from five villages. Besides, the villagers, wealthy merchants and other royals also helped the University both in cash and kind. Villagers donated food grains, vegetables, and other provisions for the use of inmates. The fame of Nalanda University was such that the king of Suvarnadvipa (modern Malaya Peninsula, Java and Sumatra), Maharaja Balaputradeva erected a monastery in Nalanda and requested Devapala to donate five villages for the maintenance of that monastery.

The Pala kings patronised Hinduism too. They gave donations for learning and educational purposes. Vinayakapala built one thousand temples in honour of the Saiva deity. They gave donations to brahmans to settle in their country and run gurukulas.

The Palas had close trade contacts and cultural links with South East Asia and China. The trade with South East Asia and China was very profitable and added greatly to the prosperity of the Pala empire. The powerful Sailendra dynasty which ruled over Malaya, Java, Sumatra and neighbouring islands sent many embassies to the Pala kings.

Rashtrakutas

When the Palas were ruling over eastern India and the Pratiharas over the north India, the Deccan was being ruled by the Rashtrakutas. The term 'Rashtrakutas' means designated officers in charge of territorial divisions called Rashtras. The members of family were officers of Rashtra under the early Chalukyas of Badami. Dantivarman or Dantidurga was the founder of the dynasty with his capital at Manyakhet or Malkhed near modern Sholapur. Dantivarman was succeeded by his uncle Krishna I about A.D. 758, who extended his kingdom from Maharashtra to Karnataka.

With the accession of Dhruva, about A.D. 779, a new era began in the history of Rashtrakutas. Like his predecessors he defeated the Chalukyas of Vengi and the Gangas of Mysore and opened the struggle against the Pallavas. He was the first Rashtrakuta ruler to decisively intervene in the tripartite struggle being waged for the supremacy in north India and defeat both the Pratihara king Vatsaraja and the Pala king Dharmapala. After his successful campaigns in the north, he added the emblem of Ganga and Yamuna to his imperial insignia.

Dhruva was succeeded by Govinda III (A.D. 793-813) who also made incursions into north India and fought successfully against the Pala king Dharmapala and Chakrayudha,

the ruler of Kanauj. He also shattered the confederacy of the Ganga, Chera, Pandya and Pallava rulers in south.

Govind III was succeeded by his son Amoghavarsha I (A.D. 814-878). Amoghavarsha who ruled for 60 years, is known better, not for his martial spirit of his predecessor, but for his leanings towards religion and literature. The principles of Jainism appealed to him more. He was a patron of literature and patronised the men of letter. Amoghavarsha, himself wrote *Kavirajamarga*, which is the earliest Kannada work on poetics. He was a great builder and is said to have built the capital city Manyakhet so as to excel the city of Indra. Among Amoghavarsha's successors, the two great Rashtrakuta rulers were Indra III (A.D. 915-927) and Krishna III (939-965). Indra III defeated the Pratihara king Mahipala I and plundered his capital Kanauj. Arab traveller Al-Masudi calls the Rashtrakuta king as the greatest king of India.

Krishna III was the last in a line of brilliant rulers. He was engaged in a struggle against the Paramaras of Malwa and eastern Chalukya of Vengi. He also launched a campaign against the Chola ruler of Tanjore and his armies reached Rameshwaram, where he built a pillar of victory and a temple.

The ascendancy of the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan constitutes one of the most brilliant chapters in the history of the Deccan. They ruled more than three hundred years. Rashtrakuta rulers not only patronised Saivism and Vaishnavism but also protected Jainism, Buddhism and Islam. They permitted the Muslim merchants to settle in their kingdom, build mosques and preach their religion. Their tolerant policies gave great impetus to trade and commerce.

In the field of literature too they equally patronised Sanskrit, Prakrit, *Apabhramsa*, a forerunner of many modern Indian languages and Kannada. Their rock-cut cave temples excavated at Ellora belonging to Brahmanical Buddhist and Jain faiths are the symbols of their religious toleration and are one of the splendours of Indian arts. The Kailash temple built by the Rashtrakuta king Krishna I, is an unrivalled and stupendous piece of art. An entire hill side was cut off to the extent of 160 feet by 280 feet, and was carved into a magnificent monolithic temple with a spacious hall and finely carved pillars. The plinth of the temple has been carved in such a way that it appears as if the entire temple is resting on the back of animals like lions, elephants etc.

Tripartite Struggle

The above account makes it quite clear that towards the close of the eighth century A.D. there were three great powers in India. The Gurjara Pratihara in the north, the Palas in the east and the Rasthrakutas in the Deccan emerged as powerful dynasties almost at the same time. The tripartite struggle for the supremacy between the Palas, the Gurjara Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas was the important event of these centuries.

It is said that the main cause for this battle was the desire to possess the city of Kanauj which was then a symbol of sovereignty. Besides, the inter-regional warfare was also aimed to control the intermediate fertile regions. The tilt of the power among these three was determined both by the internal strength of the respective region and the inability of the rulers to extend their control beyond their respective regions for a longer duration. Their military equipment, administrative machinery and the strategic concepts were all more or less the same. The Arab travellers also testify that these powers were equal in strength. Due to this balance of power there was a great deal of political stability within the regions which fostered the development of culture and education.

As we have seen above, the first encounter took place among the Rashtrakuta king, Dhruva, the Pratihara king, Vatsaraja and the Pala king, Dharmapala. In the first phase, Rashtrakutas achieved a complete triumph, but the death of Dhruva proved to be a set back to Rashtrakutas. In the second phase Pala king Devapala (A.D. 821-860) was the most prominent because his contemporary Pratihara and Rashtrakuta kings were weak rulers. But in the ninth century the Pratihara kings Bhoja (A.D. 836-885) and Mahendrapala (A.D. 885-910) proved to be more powerful than their contemporaries of the other two dynasties. Towards the end of the ninth century the Rashtrakutas gained in the strength once again under their kings Indra II and Krishna III whose power was felt not only in the north but also in the south.

Around the end of the tenth century A.D. the powers of Pratiharas, Pala and Rashtrakutas declined almost simultaneously. The end of these three dynasties marked the end of the glorious era of more than three hundred years.

Exercises

1. Describe the political condition of north India after the death of Harsha.
2. Who were the Gurjara Pratiharas? Discuss their contribution to Indian culture.
3. What do you mean by the tripartite struggle? Discuss it in the context of the Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas.
4. Discuss the history of the Rashtrakutas and their contribution to Indian culture.
5. Discuss the history of the Palas and their contribution to Indian culture.
6. Write short notes on:
   (i) Yashovarman of Kanauj
   (ii) Mihira Bhoja
   (iii) Amoghavarsha
   (iv) Devapala

CHAPTER 21

THE HISTORY OF KAMARUPA

THE modern state of Assam was called Kamarupa and Pragjotish in ancient times. The latter name was used for the capital of Kamarupa also. There was another kingdom called Davaka in this region which has been mentioned in the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta as the border state along with Kamarupa.

THE modern state of Assam was called Kamarupa and Pragjotish in ancient times. The latter name was used for the capital of Kamarupa also. There was another kingdom called Davaka in this region which has been mentioned in the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta as the border state along with Kamarupa. The kingdom of Kamarupa at one time extended up to northern and western Bengal, some bordering lands of China as well as Davaka. The region was ruled by a single dynasty from the time of Mahabharata up to the middle of the seventh century till Bhaskaravarma. The sources of history of this dynasty are the Dubi and Nidhanapur copper plates of Bhaskaravarma. Some other sources include genealogical seals from Nalanda and accounts of Banabhatta and Hiuen-Tsang.

The dynasty claims its descent from the Asura Naraka who, according to the epics and the *Puranas*, was the son of Vishnu (in his *Varaha* incarnation) and the Earth. Therefore, this dynasty is also called Bhauma (*i.e.* the son of Bhumi). Naraka had a son, Bhagadatta, who is said to have taken part in the Mahabharata war. The inscriptions of the dynasty claim that king Bhagadatta and his successors ruled for about 3,000 years in Kamarupa and then came the king Pushyavarma. From these sources we have a list of thirteen kings starting from Pushyavarma, a contemporary of Samudragupta, as follows :

(i) Pushyavarma
(ii) Samudravarma
(iii) Balavarma
(iv) Kalyanavarma
(v) Ganapativarma
(vi) Mahendravarma
(vii) Narayanavarma
(viii) Bhutivarma
(ix) Chandramukhavarma
(x) Sthitavarma
(xi) Susthitavarma
(xii) Supratishthitavarma
(xiii) Bhaskaravarma

Among these the last king, Bhaskaravarma was a contemporary of Harshvardhana in the first half of the seventh century. The eighth king Bhutivarma was ruling in the middle of the sixth century is known from his own records. Thus the first king Pushyavarma has approximately been placed in about A.D. 350. He must have acknowledged the supremacy of Samudragupta.

The Nalanda seal calls Pushyavarma the lord of Pragjotish, and gives the title *of maharajadhiraja* to the first three kings. But historians attach little significance to this high sounding title because they acknowledged the sovereignty of the imperial Guptas. We do not know much about the first six kings of this dynasty. The seventh king Narayanavarma or his predecessor performed two horse sacrifices which shows that he may have become independent of the Gupta empire in the first half of the sixth century.

The eighth king Bhutivarma or Mahabhutivarma was a powerful king. He flourished about the middle of the

sixth century A.D. Under him, Kamarupa became a powerful kingdom. It included the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and Sylhet and extended to the west as far as the Karatoya river which continued to be the traditional boundary of Kamarupa for a long time.

We know nothing about his son Chandramukhavarma but his grandson Sthitavarma is said to have performed a horse sacrifice. The next king Susthitavarma's name occurs in the Aphsada inscription of the later Gupta King Adityasen whose grandfather Mahasenagupta is said to have defeated him on the banks of river Lauhitya (Brahmaputra). Mahasenagupta must have fought this battle as an ally of the Maukharis, who were the imperial power in north India at that time. Some historians think that this ally of Mahasenagupta was Sasanka of Gauda and not a king of Maukhari dynasty. But it is not clear how a small kingdom in Rajasthan became an ally and subsidiary ruler of a king of distant Bengal. But Sasanka may be identified with the same Gauda king who defeated and imprisoned Supratisthitavarma and Bhaskaravarma soon after the death of their father Susthitavarma. By that time Supratishthitavarma had not yet ascended the throne. However, they managed to escape from the prison of the Gauda king and Supratishthitavarma ruled for a short period. His brother, Bhaskaravarma, succeeded him.

Bhaskaravarma

Bhaskaravarma was an ally of king Harshavardhana. He is described in *Harshacharita* of Banabhatta. Bhaskaravarma sent his ambassador Hamsavega with presents to have an alliance with Harsha. This was a diplomatic move on the part of the king of Kamarupa who was earlier defeated and imprisoned along with his elder brother by the king of Gauda. On the other hand the elder brother of Harsha, Rajyavardhana, also was killed treacherously by the same king of Gauda, and Harsha had declared to destroy them. Thus it was an alliance between the two kings against their common enemy. The narration of Banabhatta has disturbed the chronological sequence of the events and therefore some confusion has cropped up about the history of the time. This alliance must have taken place when Harsha advanced against the king of Gauda in his later career; and not immediately after the coronation of Harsha. As a result of this alliance and with the help of Harsha, Bhaskaravarma succeeded in occupying a large portion of Bengal from the kingdom of Sasanka.

Bhaskaravarma's influence over the Buddhist monastery of Nalanda is also attested by the account of Hiuen-Tsang. He narrates that King Bhaskaravarma sent a messenger to the head of Nalanda monastery, Silabhadra, to send the 'great pilgrim from China' to him. But this request was acceded to, only after a threat. Hiuen-Tsang visited Kamarupa and

stayed there for about a month. Now Harsha demanded from the king of Kamarupa to send the Chinese pilgrim to his court. This also could materialise only after a threat to Bhaskaravarma. The latter met Harsha in person, along with Hiuen-Tsang at Kajangala where the former was camping. He also attended the great religious assembly at Kanauj and Prayaga.

The story of Hiuen-Tsang shows that Bhaskaravarma had control over north Bengal and also some influence over Nalanda in Bihar. The dynasty came to an end with the death of Bhaskaravarma in the same way as it happened with the kingdom of Harsha. It is indicated by the evidence that the kingdom was occupied by a *Mlechchha* ruler named Salastambha. We know the names of a few successors of Salastambha but no details about them. Some believe that he was a scion of the family of Bhaskaravarma. But there is nothing to corroborate it.

Exercises

1. Write the chronology of Kamarupa kings.
2. Write about the sources of the history of Kamarupa.
3. Write about the Gauda king.
4. Write in detail the achievements of Bhaskaravarma and his relations with Harshavardhana.

Things to Do

Collect material on the culture of Kamarupa.

CHAPTER 22

SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN THE POST HARSHA PERIOD

THE last stage of Prakrit is represented by the *Apabhramsa*, which was considered important on account of the fact that the modern languages like Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and Bangla have all evolved from it.

Language and Literature

Sanskrit remained the main language, and literature of various kinds continued to be written in it. Pali and Prakrit were used for writing the Buddhist and Jain religious literature. Vakapati's *Gaudavaho*, a biography of Yashovarman of Kanauj, was the last major work in the older tradition of Prakrit. The last stage of Prakrit languages is represented by the *Apabhramsha*, which was considered important on account of the fact that the modern languages like Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and Bangla have all evolved from it.

During this period, literature shows considerable development. The literature produced during this period exercised a profound influence on the traditions of the succeeding centuries in their respective fields.

A number of *kavyas* with two fold or even more significance constitutes a special feature of this period. The *Ramacharita* of Sandhyakara Nandi written during the reign of the Pala king, Mahipal, presents both the story of Rama and the life of king Ramapala of Bengal.

The *Raghavaphandavija* of Dhananjaya Shrutokriti describes the stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* at the same time. The marriage of Siva and Parvati; and Krishna and Rukmini are described in the *Parvati-Rukminiya* of Vidyamadhava, the court poet of the Chalukya king Somadeva. Hemachandra is also credited with having composed a work entitled *Saptasandhana* (having seven alternative interpretations). The tendency of working out the intricate patterns of double, triple or even more meanings reflect ample leisure combined with wealthand excessive love of embellishment. The climax of this style may be found in the *Shatarthakavya* of Somaprabhacharya in which every verse was meant for being interpreted in a hundred ways.

A large number of Jaina narratives dealing with the lives of Jain teachers were composed. The most famous are *Adinathacharita* by Vardhamana, *Shantinathacharita* by Devachandra, *Prithvichandracharita* by Shantisuri, *Parshvanathacharita* by Devabhadra, *Kuarapalacharita* and *Neminathacharita* by Hemachandra etc. The *Sukumalachariu* by Shrihara and the *Neminathacharita* by Haribhadra are wholly written in *Apabhramsa*.

Many historical texts in the *kavya* form were written during this period. The most remarkable of them is the *Rajatarangini* by Kalhana. The text is unique as it is the only known attempt at writing history in modern sense. The *Rajendra Karnapura* of Shambu is an eulogy of king Harsha of Kashmir. The *Prithviraja Vijay* of Jayanka, *Dvayashraya Mahakavya* by Hemachandra, *Kirtikaumndi* by Someshvara and *Vikramankadevacharita* of Bilhana, *Navasahasankacharita* of Padmagupta and *Kirti Kaumudi* of Somadeva belong to the same genre.

A large number of treatises were written on poetics. The most important among such works are *Kavyamimamsa* by Rajashekhara, *Dasharupa* by Dhananjaya, *Saraswati Kanthabharana* by Bhoja, *Kavyanushasana* of Hemachandra and *Kavikanthabharana* by Kshemendra etc.

In the field of prose literature, *Brihatkathamanjari* by Kshemendra, *Kathasaritasagara* by Somadeva, *Kathakoshaprakarana* by Jineshvara Suri are famous. In these works prose tended to be less contrived and artificial. The themes were familiar stories from traditional sources. These stories are popular even to this day.

Drama of this period have a tenderness and subdued dramatic quality with a minimum of comic effects. They managed to retain elements of earlier plays. The famous dramas are *Lalitavigraharaja nataka* by Somadeva, the *Harikeli nataka* by Visaladeva, *Prasannaraghava* by Jayadeva, *Karnasundari* by Bilhana, *Abhidhana Chintamani, Deshi-namamala, Anekarthasamgraha* and *Nighantushesha* written by Hemachandra.

In the fields of astronomy and mathematics, the famous mathematician Bhaskaracharya flourished in the twelfth century A.D. His *Siddhanta-Shiromani* comprises four parts–*Lilavati, Vijaganita, Grahaganita and Gola*. The last one deals with astronomy. A very significant principle of *Siddhanta Shiromani* is that of perpetual motion, which was transmitted by Islam about A.D. 1200 to Europe. This in course of time led to the development of the concept of power technology. King Bhoja of Paramara dynasty had written the *Rajmariganka* on astronomy.

In the field of medicine, in the eighth century, *Charaka, Sushruta* and *Ashtangahridaya* were rendered into Tibetan and Arabic. Dridhabala of Panchananda in Kashmir revised the text of *Charaka-Samhita*. Madhava wrote several works on medicine. His best known work is the *Nidana* or *Rigvimshchana* on Pathalogy translated into Arabic under the guidance Harun-al Rashid. His other works are *Chikitsa Kutamudgara* and *Yogavyakhya*. Vagabhata II's son Tisata wrote *Chikitsakalika* or *Yoga-mala* and Tisata's son Chandratha wrote *Yogaratnasamuchchhaya*. Brinda of Bengal wrote his *Siddhayoga* between A.D. 975-1000.

Besides all these works of *kavya*, prose, dramas and historical works there are several commentaries on the religious texts. *Krityakalpataru* of Lakshmidhara, and *Chaturvarga Chintamani* of Hemadri were compiled during this period. Vijnaneshvara wrote *Mitakasara* and a commentary on the *Yajnavalkyasmriti*. Jimutavahana wrote *Dayabhaga* (Law of inheritance), *Vyavaharamatrika* and *Kalaviveka*. *Manuvritti* by Govindaraja, *Smrityarthasara* by Shridhara, the commentary on the *Yajnavalkyasmriti* by Apararka, *Smritichandrika* by Devanna Bhatta are other outstanding creations of this period. All these works

are commentaries on different *smritis* and law-digests which indicate a vigorous effort at regulating society and various works on polity such as *Nitishastra* by Mathara, *Nitisara* by Kamandaka, the *Nitivakyamrita* of Somadevasuri are important.

Society

From the seventh century A.D. onwards, two trends were continuing in society. One was the continuity of the assimilation of foreign elements and second was the segregation of *jati* system. The four varnas still constituted an umbrella beneath which *jatis* kept emerging and finding their own inter-*jati* relationship which, though broadly in keeping with the theoretical structure, were nevertheless modified by local requirements and expediency. The law of the period accepted birth, profession, and residence as the deciding factor in the determination of *jati*. As a result there were four original varnas with several *jati* and these were further subdivided into numerous sub-sections. For instance, the brahmans came to be identified by their gotra, ancestor, the branch of Vedic learning, original home and village. Inscriptions of the period also mention this fact. The kshatriyas also multiplied as a result of the assimilation of foreigners and other local people. The transformation of a specific profession into *jati* and the increasing phenomenon of hypergamous unions between different *jati* led to the rise of mixed *jati*. *Jatis* were also formed on the basis of religious sects such as Lingayats, Virasaivas, Svetambaras and Digambaras etc. The lowest were the *antyajatis*, of whom Chandalas are the most important representatives. The enumerations of the sub-divisions of these *antyajatis* differ from one law giver to another and from period to period.

The traditional professions related to four varnas were not scrupulously adhered to during this period. This tendency to deviate from the customary profession was not new, it was noticeable even in the earlier age.

The brahmans, for example did not invariably confine their activity to studying, teaching, worshipping and the performance of priestly functions. Atri speaks of kshatrya brahman, who lives by fighting, the vaisya brahman, who lives by engaging himself in agriculture and trade, the sudra brahman who sells lac, salt, milk, ghee, honey etc. Like-wise, kshatriyas, vaisyas and sudras deviated from their traditional professions and formed several mixed castes.

Another important class that emerged as a *jati* during this period was that of kayasthas, the scribes of the administration, responsible for writing documents and maintaining records. Though we start getting the reference to kayasthas from the Mauryan period itself, it appears that by the seventh century they came to be regarded as distinct *jati*.

The *smriti* authorities of this period followed the older marriage rules. The literature also reflects the new ideas and practices regarding remarriages. The

words like *punarbhu* and *didhishu* meaning a remarried woman is frequently mentioned in the literature. The marriages were often arranged by parents or other guardians of the parties and sometimes girls chose their husbands. As regard the position of women, the Commentaries on *smriti* and digests of this period follow more or less the rules laid down in early *smritis*. The women's right to inherit property was accepted by the authorities. The widow was entitled to succeed to the whole estate of her issueless, deceased husband.

Economic Life

During the post Harsha period the literary and inscriptional evidences show the advanced state of agriculture, trade and economy. *Medhatithi* included a group of seventeen articles (including rice and barley) in the category of grain (*dhanya*). *Abhidhanaratnamala* mentions a large variety of cereals and other food grains with their synonyms. From *Abhidhanaratnamala* we get the scientific knowledge of agriculture. It mentions that soils were classified variously as fertile, barren, fallow, desert, excellent as well as those green with grass or abounding in needs, those which were black or yellow, and those which owed their fertility to rivers or rains. It further mentions that different kinds of fields were selected for different classes of crops. Machines for crushing sugarcanes are mentioned in a description of the winter season in *Upamitibhavaprapanchakatha*. Irrigation by the *arahata* (Persian wheel) and by leather buckets are mentioned in the inscriptions. This shows that the so called Persian wheel was very much present in India prior to the arrival of Muslim rulers. *Medhatithi* mentioned that the agriculturist were expected to know among other things, what seed was to be sown thickly and what sparsely, what soil was fit for a particular kind of seed and what soil was not so fit, and what harvest was expected from a special variety of seed.

The early Arab writers refer to the fertility of the soil and the rich cultivation, both of grains and fruits, in India.

In the field of industry the oldest one is that of textile. The progress of Gupta period continued during this period. The records of this period mention a great variety and qualities of textiles such as woolen and hempen yarns, garments made of silk, deer's hair, and sheep and goat's wool. The professions of weavers, dyers and the tailor are mentioned in contemporary literature.

The working in the metals was pursued with much success as in the contemporary literature we find copper, brass, iron, lead, tin, silver and gold. Some centres of metal industry were famous, such as Saurashtra was famous for its bell industry while Vanga was known for its tin industry etc. Lists of jewels are preserved in various texts, which mention no less than 33 kinds of gems and analyse the good qualities of diamond, emerald, ruby, pearls, sapphire etc. Trade was flourishing

during this period as earlier. The Arab, Chinese, Indian sources mention the flow of trade between east and west via India. As regard the list of Indian exports, the Arab traveller Ibn Khordadbah writing towards the end of the ninth century, mentions Indian exports consisting of diverse products of aloe-wood, sandal wood, camphor and camphor water, nutmeg, clove pink, coconut, vegetable, textures of velvety cotton, and other variety, metals, precious and semiprecious stones, pearls, fisheries etc.

In the list of import items, horses were the most important. The best breed of horses were imported from central and western Asia.

The prosperity of the coastal towns of Gujarat, Malabar and Tamil attracted foreign merchants to settle in India. The ports along the west coast of India referred to by Arab geographers were Debal (in Indus delta) Cambay, Thana, Sopara and Quilon. The trade with South East Asia increased enormously during this period. The Sailendra kings established political, cultural and economic relations with Indian kings. The Arab travellers were attracted by the wealth of Sailendra kings and give descriptive details about them.

The guilds and similar associations continued to play an important part as in the previous centuries. *Medhatithi* mentions both industrial and mercantile guilds. These guilds consisted of people following common profession such as tradesmen, artisans, money lenders, etc. Artisans worked both in towns and villages. But concentration was greater in the towns, where professional associations were recognised. In the inscriptions of this period we have evidence of, not only of different classes of guilds, but also of their constitution and functions. These guilds collectively made endowments for pious objects or deposited them with the trust to provide for such objects out of the accruing interest. From the south Indian inscriptions we have the evidence of the working of two famous trading corporations. The first is the *Manigramam* whose history can be traced from the end of the ninth century down to the thirteenth century. Its activity carried on in the coastal as well as inland towns of the south India. The second is the famous *Nanadesa-Tisaiyayirattu Ainnurruvar* which was destined to extend its activities to Burma and Sumatra in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. It began its carrier from the ninth century onwards.

Religion and Philosophy

The fundamental features of religious ideas and practices which characterised the previous period continued during this period. But the relative importance of the different religious sects undergoes a great change because of the reciprocal influence of different religious sects upon one another. Both Buddhism and Jainism developed theistic tendencies on the analogy of Saivism and Vaishnavism.

During this period, Buddhism witnessed not only decadence of pure Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism, but also the appearance of a new phase

of the religious philosophy. Buddha's teachings, free from rituals, gradually gave way in the early centuries of the Christian era, to a popular form of the religion with a new ethical and devotional outlook in which Buddha had begun to be worshipped as a god. This worship now became more elaborate with devotional songs, accompanied by rites and ceremonies. The influence of Tantric ideas on Buddhism is evident in *Vajrayana* Buddhism (the vehicle of thunderbolt). The Taras or Saviouresses, spouses of the male *Bodhisattvas* received a veneration similar to that of sakti. The association of Buddhism with magical cults was a confusing development, since much of its original ethical teaching was now further submerged in ritual. The support of the Pala kings sustained it in eastern India, and the royal patronage kept it going in Orissa, Kashmir, and parts of north-western India. In south India, Kanchi was a great centre of Buddhism. The Chola kings also gave donations to Buddhists. It is said that Buddhism began to decline because it did not get the royal patronage and the coming of Islam was the final blow to it. The attacks on monasteries and killing of monks resulted in an exodus of Buddhists from eastern India.

The Jainism gained popularity among the trading classes in north and west India and the extensive royal patronage in south India. In the Deccan, it was honoured by the Gangas, Chalukyas and by Rastrakuta rulers. During this period many Jain *basadis* (temples) and *mahastambhas* (pillar) were set up in different parts. The colossal image at Sravanabelgola was set up during this time. The Jain doctrines of the four gifts (learning, food, medicine and shelter) helped to make Jainism popular among the people.

Tantricism is another sect which became popular during this time. Tantricism had originated in the sixth century but became stronger from the eighth century onwards. It was strongest in north eastern India and had close ties with Tibet, some of its rituals came from the Tibetan practices. It is said that Tantricism is the simplification of the Vedic cults and was open to all castes as well as to women. Tantric practice centred on prayers, mystical formulae, magical diagrams and symbols and the worship of a particular deity. The mother image was accorded great veneration, since life was created in the mother's womb. In this way it is also connected with *Saka-Sakti* cult. In Tantricism guru had the highest place because those desirous of becoming members of a sect had to be initiated by a guru. It is said that Tantric interest in magic led to some discoveries of a semi-scientific nature owing to experiments with chemicals and metals in particular.

Hinduism, in the forms of Saivism and Vaishnavism now became popular. The two characteristics of religious life in the preceding period viz. toleration and worship of images, not only continued in full force but are even on the increase because of popular

demand for a more personal religion deity. For this purpose, a multitude of new forms were introduced which necessitated the building of shrines and temples to house them.

In Vaishnavism, the incarnation of Vishnu became more popular and interest in the *Puranas* and epic literature, particularly, through the versions in regional languages, provided the tradition in which they incorporate the legends of the incarnations. The most popular incarnation was Krishna. Krishna and Radha were worshipped as part of a cult and their love was interpreted as the longing and attachment of the human soul for the universal soul.

In the south, *Alvars* represented the emotional side of Tamilian Vaishnavism and the *Acharyas,* who were their successors, represented the intellectual and philosophical sides of Vaishnavism and made it popular.

Saivism attained a dominant position in the society. The main principles remained the same, though there were local variations and consequent doctrinal differences. There is a form of Saivism, popularly known as Kashmir Saivism which is a kind of monism on non-dualism. It became popular in the ninth and tenth century A.D. In the south, the saiva saints, the *Nayanars* made it more popular. Another popular movement which spread in south India was of Lingayats or Virasaivas, whose philosophy was influenced both by Sankara and Ramanuja. This sect was raised into prominence by Basava, the Prime Minister of the Kalachuri king Bijjala. Lingayats are followers of Saivaism. They laid stress on love and self surrender, truth and morality and cleanliness. They allowed widow remarriage.

The bhakti movement led by *Nayanars* (Saiva saint) and *Alvars* (Vaishnav saint) spread all over the country. These saints went from place to place carrying their message of love and devotion. They disregarded the inequalities of caste. The path of bhakti advocated by these saints was open to all, irrespective of caste. This bhakti movement renewed emphasis on the *Vedas* and Vedic worship on the one hand and powerful literary and intellectual movement on the other hand.

Fig. 22.1 *Sun Temple in Rajasthan of the time of Gurjara Pratihara*

Fig. 22.2 *Statue of Vishnu Visvarupa of the time of Gurjara Pratihara*

Fig. 22.3 *Scene depicting Marriage of Siva and Parvati of the time of Gurjara Pratihara*

One of the greatest intellectuals and philosophers of this period was Sankara, also known as Adi Sankaracharya. According to the Shringeri matha tradition, Sankara took birth in Kerala around A.D. 788. His father, Shivaguru a Yajurvedin brahman, died when Sankara was only three years old. At the age of eight, he took to the life of an ascetic. Sankara studied at Kasi and after finishing his studies he turned to *digvijaya*. Sankara kept moving all over the country for preaching his philosophy and debating with the learned scholars.

The philosophy of Sankara is known as *Advaita*, meaning 'non-dual'. He believed that absolute reality, called *Brahma* is non-dual. Sankara wrote several works. These are *Brahmasutra-bhashya*, commentaries on the *Upanishads*, commentaries on *Bhagavad-Gita* etc. Thus, Sankara upheld the *Vedas* as the fountainhead of true knowledge.

The greatest achievement of Sankara is that he organised the ten branches of *Advaita* school of Saivism, known as *Dashanamis*. For the purpose of unity and integrity, and better interaction, he established four mathas in four corners of the country. These are Jyotirmatha at Badrinath in the north, Sharadapitha at Dvaravati (Dwaraka) in the west, Govardhanamatha at Puri in the east and Shringerimatha in the south and sent his four disciples to each one of these. Each matha is said to have a gotra, presiding deities, both male and female and a special formula as the

symbol of philosophical quintessence of pure monotheism. The ten orders in which Sankara organised the ascetics are known as - *Giri* (hills), *Puri* (city), *Bharati* (learning), *Vana* (wood), *Aranya* (forest), *Parvata* (mountain), *Sagara* (ocean), *Tirtha* (temple), *Ashrama* (hermitage) and *Saraswati* (true knowledge). Sankara died at the age of 32. He was an *Acharya par excellence* who took the Hindu faith to a new glory.

Another philosopher and intellectual was Ramanuja. He was a Tamil brahman born at Tirupati around A.D.1017. Ramanuja disagreed with Sankara that knowledge was the primary means of salvation. He tried to assimilate Bhakti to the tradition of the *Vedas*. He argued that the grace of God was more important than knowledge about him in order to attain salvation. Thus, Ramanuja tried to build a bridge between the bhakti and the knowledge of *Vedas*.

Education

The system of education which had developed gradually in the earlier centuries continued during this period. The later *smiritis* introduced a new sacrament called *vidyarambha* (commencement of education) and *aksharasvikriti* or *aksharabhyasa* training in the alphabet. During this time we find various types of educational institutions. The foremost are temples, which developed as social, educational and cultural entities besides being a source of religious inspiration for the people. Inscriptions give us some idea of their diverse functions such as banks, treasuries, court, parks, fairs, exhibition sheds, promoters of handicrafts, dance, music and diverse cultural activity, centres of learning and hospitals and in turn provided employment to large number of populations. Education was imparted in the temple like earlier periods. Students were either taught by the temple priests as in the smaller village temples or else attended the college attached to the larger temples. Courses in the colleges were organised in a systematic manner demanding regular attendance and instructions. Professional education continued to be maintained through the training given to apprentices in guilds and among the groups of artisans. At a more popular level, oral instruction, much simpler than the Sanskrit learning of the colleges was imparted by the saints and elders. The various centres of education provided a great impetus to discussions on religion and philosophy. The numerous mathas and other centres of education in various parts of India enabled ideas to flow freely and quickly from one part of the country to another. Higher education was not considered complete till the person had visited the various centres of learning in different parts of the country and held discussions with the scholars there. The manner in which ideas could be transmitted throughout the country was important in upholding and strengthening the cultural unity of India.

Education was also available in the Jain and Buddhist monasteries at Vikramsila, Oddantapura, Valabhi and Nalanda, which were great centres of higher learning. The inscriptions and literary works of the period prove that there existed, organised educational institutions which were founded and maintained by the people from the king down to humble individuals. Education was imparted free with clothes, food and lodging. Inscriptions of the period mention the *dana* of various kind including land for the purpose of *vidya* (learning). This tradition of donation for the purpose of education is still continuing in Indian society. The ancient Indian education system was thought to be unique by foreign travellers because every village had a school and every individual participated in its maintenance. As a result, India had the highest literacy rate in comparison to other countries of the world till the time up to the nineteenth century. This is accepted even by British and other European historians and educationists.

Art and Architecture

As regards the art and architecture, it was undoubtedly a fruitful age as would be apparent from the numerous temples that are standing for the 1200 years. These temples are among the most exquisite edifices of that era, representing most of the styles of architecture.

The famous temples of Orissa, specially those of Bhubaneshwar are superb specimens of the Nagar style or north Indian style. Each temple consist of *vimana* (towered shrine) and the *jagmohana* (audience chamber) besides the *nata mandapa* (dance chamber) and *bhoga mandapa* (offering hall). The best example of this type is the great Lingaraja temple of Bhubaneshwar and Sun temple of Konark.

Another place, where several excellent *nagar* style temples still stand, is Khajuraho in Bundelkhand.

Fig. 22.4 *Paharpur Stupa (now in Bangladesh) of the time of Dharamapala*

Fig. 22.5 *(a) Bodhisattava from Nalanda, Pala Period*

Fig. 22.5 *(b) Avolokitesvara from Nalanda, Pala Period*

These temples built by the Chandelas, are on raised plinth and known for their carving and erotic sculptures. Kandarya Mahadeva temple is one of the finest example.

In Kashmir, the Sun temple called the Martanda temple built by Lalitaditya Muktapida around the eighth century A.D, is the best example of Kashmir style of architecture.

The Jains were also great builders and their temples generally have the octagonal dome and are decorated with subjects drawn from Jain mythology. The best specimens of their architecture, are the famous temples of Dilwara (Mt. Abu) and Satrunjaya (Palitana). These temples are most remarkable for their elegant carvings and rich design. The Jain sculpture of Gommatesvara, (57 feet) the son of the first Jina Rishabhanatha, at Sravanabelagola (Hasan, Distt. Mysore) is one of the largest free standing images in the world. This granite statue on Indragiri hill represents the immovable serenity

of the one practicing the *Kayotsarga* austerity, undisturbed by the serpents about his feet, the ant hills rising to his thighs, or the undergrowth that has already reached his shoulders.

In the Deccan, the temples of Vatapi (Badami) and Pattadakal (Bijapur district) are stylistically different. These temples stand on an elaborately decorated base or plinth. Some good examples are the Hoysalesvara temple at Halebid, which though incomplete, is unsurpassed by any Indian temple in both its structural and its decorative features. Besides free standing temples in the south, temples are also hewn out of solid rock. The Kailash temple at Ellora, dedicated to Siva excavated during the reign of Krishna I of the Rashtrakuta dynasty, is regarded as the architectural marvel in the world.

In the south, Pallavas gave an immense impetus to art, and the temple at Dalavanur (Arcot district) Pallavaram, Vallam (Chinglepeet district) as well as the *Rathas* and shore temples at Mamallapuram, Kailasanatha at Kanchi stand today as noble monuments of their artistic genius.

The Cholas carried on the architectural traditions of the Pallavas and built several temples in the south. The Dravidian temples were marked by the square *vimana*, *mandapa*, *gopuram*, halls with

Fig. 22.6 *Kailash Temple at Ellora*

profusely decorated columns, conventional lions (*yalis*) for ornamentation, the use of the bracket and of compound columns etc. In the later structures the central towers are dwarfed by exquisitely carved *gopurams* rising to a great height. The best example of this type reaching to culmination is the Meenakshi temple of Madurai. Most of the Hindu temples are either devoted to Siva or Vishnu.

Apart from architecture and sculpture, the art of painting was also practiced. The older tradition of mural painting continued to be used to decorate the walls of temples and palaces. Miniature paintings also began during this time which become popular later in the Mughal Period. The Jain monks of western India and the Buddhist in Nepal and eastern India, Saiva and Vaishnav in the south, began the illustration of their manuscripts. They painted small pictures on the palm-leaf showing the scenes described in the text. At first the pictures were simple but slowly they began to put in more and more details and colours, until each picture became a fine painting in itself.

Exercises

1. Explain the following:
   Kavyas, Punarbhu, Dhanya, Vajrayana, Bodhisattvas, Basadis, Advaita, Matha, *Vimana, Gopuram.*
2. Describe the literary trends of the post Harsha period with reference to some important works.
3. Write about the economic condition during this period with special reference to trade and commerce.
4. Write about the following during the post Harsha period:
   (i) Social condition
   (ii) Religion and philosophy
   (iii) Education
   (iv) Art and Architecture

Things to Do

- Make a project on the art and architecture of the period.
- Make a project on India's relation with other countries.
- Collect material on four mathas established by Sankara.

Chapter 23

Cultural Interactions with the Outside World with Special Reference to South East Asia

The most remarkable aspect of this spread is that it was a spread not by means of any conquests or threat to life of an individual or society but by means of voluntary acceptance of cultural and spiritual values of India.

WE have seen in the earlier chapters that India was in contact with the outside world, commercially, right from about the middle of the third millennium B.C. It was in touch with Mesopotamic civilization from where the material remains of Harappan civilization have been found.

However, the most remarkable aspect of this contact has been the spread of Indian culture and civilization in various parts of the world, specially central Asia, South East Asia, China, Japan, Korea etc. What is most remarkable of this spread is that it was a spread not by means of conquests or threat to life of an individual or society, but by means of voluntary acceptance of cultural and spiritual values of India. No other culture and civilization had achieved its spread by means of non-violence and cultural influence.

Central Asia and China

From the second century B.C. onwards, India maintained commercial contact with China, central Asia, west Asia and the Roman empire. The Indian land routes were connected with the silk route that began from China and covered almost the whole of Asia up to the Caspian sea. The silk route served as a great channel for the transmission of cultures of the then known world.

The impact of Indian culture was felt strongly in central Asia and China via the silk route. Cultural exchanges that took place between India and the countries of central Asia are visible from the discoveries of ancient stupas, temples, monasteries, images and paintings found in all these countries. A large number of Sanskrit and Buddhist texts were translated in to different languages. Besides, chinese travellers, notably Fa-Hien and Hiuen-Tsang, who visited India respectively in fifth and seventh centuries A.D., have thrown a flood of light on the history and culture of the region. Turfan, Khotan, Kuchi, Aqsu, Kashgar, Qara Shahr (Agnidesa) were the great centres of Buddhism and Indian culture. The early Kushanas accepted Buddhism and worked to spread it amongst the nomadic hordes of central Asia. Buddhism moulded and softened the violent ways of life of the central Asian people and continued as a dominant religious force for more than thousand years. We also know that some of the Kushana kings had adopted Hinduism.

The early contacts between China and India were established through three trade routes – central Asia, Yunan and Burma, and by sea via South East Asia. The contacts on a regular basis between India and China, began around the second century B.C., With the reign of the Kushanas especially of Kanishka, Buddhism from India made a great influence over China. Having crossed the inhospitable tracts and central Asian territories, the Buddhist missionaries entered China from the first century B.C. onwards. Here they found a land different from central Asia. The Chinese were a highly cultured people. They listened to the thrilling message of the Buddha with avidity. The Buddhist philosophy appealed to their intellectuals because China

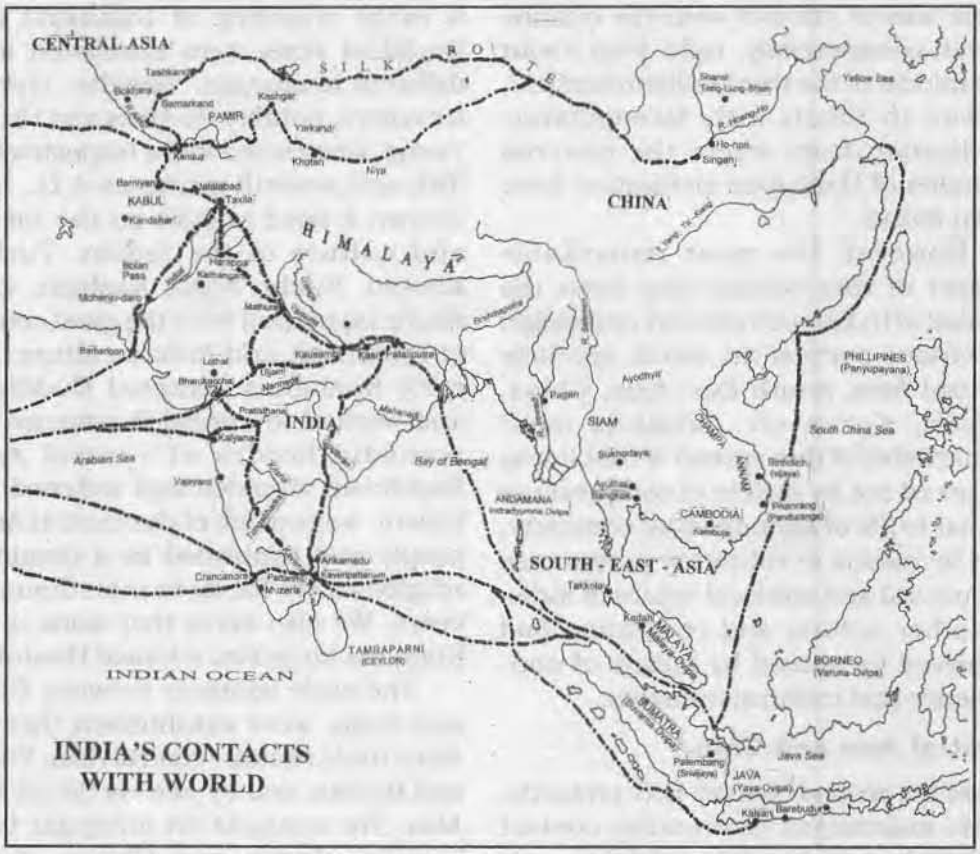


Fig. 23.1 *Map of India and South East Asia*

already had a developed philosophical school in Confucianism. Buddhism served as a great unifying factor and became an integral part of the Chinese life imbibing Confucianism within it.

Among Indian scholars, who went to China, the most notable is Kumarajiva, who stayed for 12 years (A.D. 401-412) and work for the spread of Buddhism. Having accepted the new religion, Buddhist scholars from China were anxious to learn more and more about it. Braving the hazards of a long and perilous journey, they came to visit the land of Buddha. They stayed in India and collected Buddhist relics and manuscripts related to Buddhism and learnt about it staying at the various educational centres.

Among the Chinese monks who visited India, Fa-Hien seems to be the first. He visited during the reign of Chandragupta II. In A.D. 420, a batch of monks under the leadership of Fa-yong came to India. In the seventh century A.D. Hiuen-Tsang and I-tsing visited India. During the reign of

Harsha, China and India also exchanged embassies.

Indian scholars also visited China between the fourth and sixth centuries. The most noteworthy among them were Buddhayasa, Gunabhadra, Jinagupta, Jinanabhara, Paramartha, Bodhidharma and Dharmagupta. They made a great impact upon the Chinese people. This two way traffic of scholars and monks was responsible for cultural contacts and exchange of ideas. From China, Buddhism spread to Korea, Japan, Mongolia and other neighbouring countries, where it was welcomed with great enthusiasm and played a powerful role in the cultural history of these countries.

Sri Lanka

From the days of the *Ramayana*, India had links with Sri Lanka, which was popularly known as Lanka in *Ramayana*. The story of Sita's abduction and then taken to Lanka is well known to every Indian child, though many scholars feel that the *Ramayana's* Lanka may be a different one. In ancient times Sri Lanka was also known as Tamraparni.

During the Mauryan period, Ashoka sent his son Mahendra and his daughter Sanghamitra to spread Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The famous Bodhi tree of Sri Lanka planted by these royal missionaries bore rich fruit later on. Most of the people in Sri Lanka embraced Buddhism. During the reign of Samudragupta, king Meghavarma of Sri Lanka sent an embassy to the king with a request that he may be allowed to build a monastery at Bodh Gaya for the Buddhist pilgrims from Sri Lanka. Buddhism played an important role in shaping Sri Lankan culture. The *Dipavansa* and *Mahavamsa* are well known Sri Lankan Buddhist sources. Sri Lankan literature, painting, dance, folklores, art and architecture etc., have been greatly influenced by India. Pallava king Narasimhavarman helped Sri Lankan king Manavarma to secure his throne. It also became the part of Chola empire during the reign of Rajaraja (*c.* A.D. 985-1014).

Mayanmar

Mayanmar (earlier known as Burma) was also influenced by the Indian culture. Hiuen-Tsang mentions about several Hinduised kingdoms of this region. It not only adopted Indian religion but also its culture, language etc. They developed their own Pali language and translated both Buddhist and Hindu scriptures in their version of Pali. A large number of Buddhist and Brahmanical temples of great size and artistry were erected in Mayanmar.

South East Asia

The region of South East Asia has always been rich in spices, minerals and metals. Hence, in ancient times, Indians called it *Suvarnabhumi* or *Suvarnadvipa* – the land of gold. Indians travelled to South East Asia in search of trade and adventure from quite early time as several stories of *Jatakas*, *Brihatakatha*, *Kathasaritasagar* and even foreign sources like *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* refer to the voyages of Indian

merchants to these countries. With these travellers the message of Indian religions and culture also spread there. Around the third and fourth centuries A.D. there developed powerful kingdoms and empires under kings with Indian names and most probably of Indian descent. Here also most of the dynasties and kings traced their origin to India.

The famous kingdoms of Champa (Annam) and Kambuja (Cambodia) were ruled by the kings of Indian origins. The rulers of Champa were great warriors and successfully maintained their independence against their neighbours for more than a thousand years till the Mongols overran Champa.

In Kambuja, Kaudinya dynasty of Indian origin ruled from the first century A.D. The kings of Kambuja built an empire which at its height included almost whole of modern Vietnam and Malaya. We can reconstruct the history of Kambuja from numerous Sanskrit inscriptions and from literary works. Also we get a glimpse of its former splendour from the magnificent temples, which are still to be seen.

The famous Sailendra dynasty which ruled over the vast empire including Malaya, Java, Sumatra, Borneo and Bali, traced its origin to India. The Sailendra empire, established in the eighth century, was a prosperous empire and continued up to the thirteenth century A.D. In the eleventh century the Sailendra empire entered into maritime struggle with the Chola empire of south India. Rajendra Chola conquered part of the Sailendra empire – mainly the region of modern Indonesia. The Cholas could not keep it under their control for long and soon the Sailendras succeeded in regaining their territories.

Bali is the only country where Hindu culture flourished and survived. Today, while the entire Archipelago has accepted Islam, Bali alone remains faithful to Hindu culture and religion.

We have so far discussed the brief history of kingdoms of *Suvarnadvipa,* Perhaps no other region in the world has felt the impact of India's culture and religion as has the South East Asia. The most important source of study of the remains of this cultural intercourse and impact are the Sanskrit inscriptions, written in Indian script, pure or slightly modified. They have been found all over the region in Burma, Siam, Malay Peninsula, Annam, Cambodia, Sumatra, Java, Borneo and Bali. A study of these inscriptions and other literature shows that the language, literature, religious, political and social institutions were greatly influenced by India.

The varna system which forms the fundamental basis of the Hindu society was introduced in most of these areas. The division of society into brahmans, kshatriyas, vaisyas and sudras were known. The system did not attain the rigidity as in India. Thus, inter-marriage and inter-dinning was widely prevalent. On the whole, the *jati* system, as it prevails today among the Balinese of Bali and Lombok, may be

regarded as typical of the original RigVedic varna scheme, where the society was divided on the basis of profession and not on the basis of birth.

The ideals of marriage, details of the ceremony and the family relations generally resemble those of India.

The most popular form of amusement was the shadow play called *Wayung* (like puppet shows of India). The themes of *Wayung* are usually derived from the two Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata,* which are still very popular in the countries of South East Asia, despite the fact that most of the countries have now adopted Islam.

The literature and inscriptions written in Sanskrit and Pali shows that the language was highly cultivated and was used both in the court and the society. They borrowed the philosophical ideas, Vedic religion and Puranic and epic myths and legends along with all the prominent Brahmanical and Buddhist divinities and ideas associated with them. Indian months and astronomical systems were also adopted. The most important thing is that they introduced the geographical names associated with India. We find names like Dvaravati, Champa, Amaravati, Gandhara, Videha, Ayuthia (Ayodhya), Kamboja, Kalinga and river names like Gomati, Ganga, Jamuna, Chandrabhaga etc. They still call their hospitals, schools, libraries and several other public places by their original Sanskrit names.

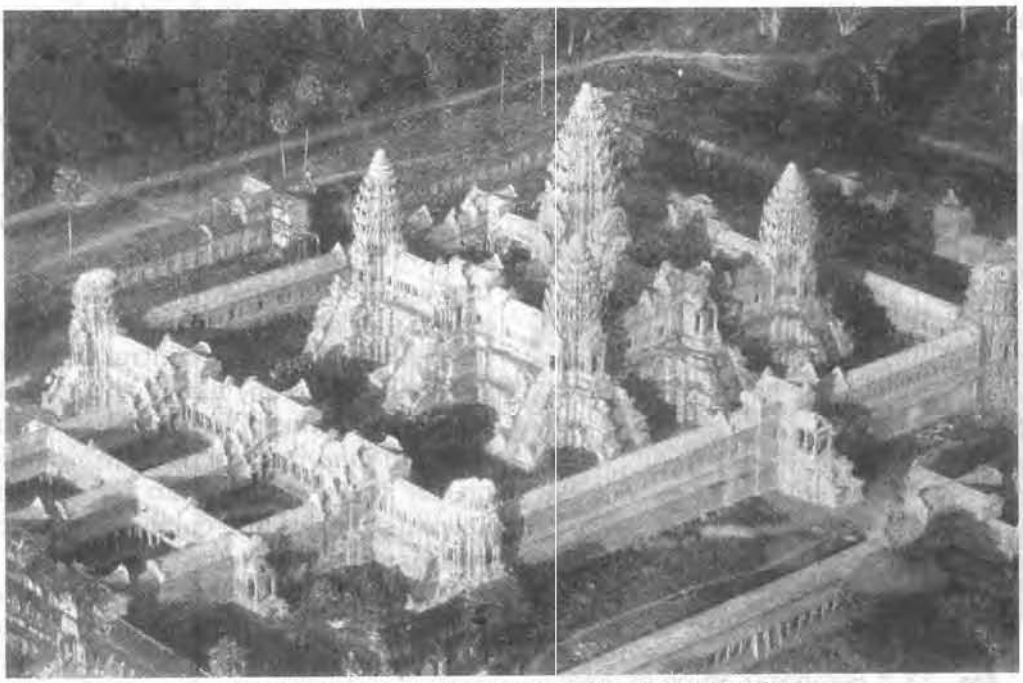


Fig. 23.2 *Angkorvat Temple of Cambodia*

Both Hinayana and Mahayana forms of Buddhism, along with Vaishnavism and Saivism with several other minor sects of Brahmanism, were prevalent among these people. The images of Hindu gods and goddesses have been found. The worship of Trinity (i.e. Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha) was widely prevalent. However, the place of honour seems to have been accorded to Siva.

Buddhism also made a stronghold in society. Some places became famous centres of Buddhism. Chinese chronicles also testify the dominance of Buddhism in this region. I-tsing stayed for seven years at Sri Vijaya for the study of Buddhist texts. Another interesting feature was the large number of *ashramas*, which were established to impart knowledge on the patterns of Indian temples, mathas, viharas, *ghatikas* and *agraharas* associated with Vaishnavism, Saivism and Buddhism.

Fig. 23.3 *Borobodur Stupa at Java*

Art and Architecture

We get a glimpse of the former splendour of art and architecture of South East Asia from its magnificent temples, stupas and sculptures. Large number of images of gods and goddesses belonging to Buddhism and Brahmanism show the characteristic features of Indian iconography and artistic excellence.

Of the several most important specimen of architecture are the Angkorvat temple, Borobudur stupa, Buddhist and Brahmanical temples in Java and Mayanmar. These masterpieces of architectural art portray in stone the sublimity and depths of India's cultural impact on South East Asia.

Angkorvat temple near the city of Angkor Thom was dedicated to Vishnu. This temple was built between A.D. 1112 to 1180. The walled enclosure of the temple is 987×1005 m. with a moat surrounding it. The moat has a length of 4 km. The magnificent temple itself is 66 ×70 m. The central shikhara rises about 70 m. above the ground level. The stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are narrated in relief on the walls of the main temple and several galleries and causeways which run for several hundred metres.

The Sailendras were the followers of Mahayana Buddhism. Their devotion to their faith is reflected in numerous structures, the most magnificent of

which is the Borobudur stupa in Java. This stupa, built in the eighth century A.D. is famous for its terraced style of architecture and ingenuity of its sculptured walls. This noble building consists of a series of nine successive terraces and the whole structure is crowned by a bell shaped stupa at the centre of the top most terrace. Six lower terraces are square in plan, while the upper three are circular. The three upper most terraces are encircled by a ring of stupas, each containing an image of Buddha. The total number of such images of Buddha are 432. The central stupa has the image of a *Dhyani* Buddha, which is considered as the finest specimen of Indo-Javanese sculpture.

Fig. 23.4 *A Hindu Temple in Java*

Fig. 23.5 *A Stone sculpture of Brahma in the Wall of a Temple in Mayanmar*

The Brahmanical temples in Java may not have been as grand as the stupa of Borobudur but the temples in the valley of Prambonan are noteworthy. Its complex consists of eight main temples, three in each row and two between them, enclosed by a wall. Then there are three rows of minor temples around the wall on each side making a total of 156 temples. Of the three main temples in the western row the central one is the biggest and the most renowned, and contains an image of Siva. One to the north has an image

of Vishnu and that to the south an image of Brahma. The temples have a series of 42 panels of relief-sculptures depicting the story of the *Ramayana* from the beginning up to the expedition Lanka. In Mayanmar the finest temple, is Anand at Pagan. It is built in the centre of a courtyard which is about 175 m. square. The main temple is made of brick. The *garbha-griha* has an image of Buddha which is about 9.5 m. high. The temple is decorated with the sculptured panels depicting various stories of Buddha's life.

Exercises

1. Give an account of spread of Indian culture in South East Asia.
2. Discuss India's cultural contact with Sri Lanka.
3. Discuss the cultural influence of India on:
   (i) Central Asia
   (ii) China
   (iii) Mayanmar
4. Discuss India's cultural relations with China.
5. Discuss the art and architecture of South East Asia.

Things to Do

- On a map of Asia locate the name of the countries where Indian culture spread.
- Collect the picture of Hindu and Buddhist temples built in South East Asian countries and make a collage.
- Take a group project to write an essay on the spread of Indian culture on different parts of the world and write about the impact of it still visible in these areas.

GLOSSARY

Agrahara	Donation of land or taxes from a village by the king to the learned brahman(s).
Agnikula	Certain Rajput clans who claim to have emerged from *Yajna Havana-Kunda.*
Ajivika	A heterodox sect closer to Jainism which flourished at the time of the Buddha.
Amatya	Official designation for a high official used right from the Mauryan Period.
Aranyakas	The Vedic texts, traditionally composed by hermits.
Artha	Prosperity and well-being, one of the four aims of life of a Hindu.
Arthashastra	The theory of polity; also the title of a treatise on the subject by Kautilya, belonging to the Mauryan period.
Ashramas/ Ashrama	The four stages of life; also a place where hermits live.
Ayukta	Designation of an officer frequently used in the Mauryan period.
Bhagavata	A sect devoted to Vishnu.
Bhukti	An administrative unit of a kingdom, frequently referred to in the Gupta period.
Bodhisattva	A person who attains *nirvana* by working for the welfare of the world and voluntarily postpones release from rebirth; also regarded as an incarnation of the Buddha, prior to his own birth in the world.
Brahmacharin	Celibate studentship, the first of the four stages *(Ashramas)* of life.
Brahmanas	The Vedic texts dealing with rituals and sacrifice.

Chaitya	A sacred enclosure. The term is also used for a Buddhist place of worship.
Charvaka	A religious sect following a materialist philosophy.
Devadana	Donated revenue assigned to a temple.
Digambara	A Jaina sect whose followers do not believe in keeping even a small piece of cloth on themselves.
Dharma	Piety, Morality — a way of life.
Dharmasastras	Texts on laws relating to society and religious observances of the Hindus.
Doab	The area between two rivers.
Dvija	The twice-born; referring to the first birth which is the physical birth and the second the initiation into educational status.
Garbhagriha	The *sanctum sanctorum* of the Hindu temple.
Gayatrimantra	The verses of the *RigVeda* wherein the request has been made to illuminate one's mind with knowledge.
Grama	A village.
Hinayana	One of the two major Buddhist sects.
Jati	Family or a group of people defined by their profession.
Kalpa	A day of Brahma equivalent to 4,320 million earth years.
Kaliyuga	The fourth and final age of the aeon.
Karma	Action or deed, and also the theory of conditioning one's future births by the deeds of the present or the previous lives.
Kayastha	A *jati* associated with revenue records, first found in the Mauryan period and frequently mentioned in the medieval period.
Kharoshthi	A script in which Ashokan inscription of *Shahbazgari* and *Manashera* are written.
Kottom	An administrative unit.
Kula	The clan or extended family.
Kumaramatya	An official designation of a high official.
Mahakshatrapa	'Great governor', a title taken by rulers, mainly by Saka kings.

Maharajadhiraja	'Great king of kings', an imperial title.
Mandalam	An administrative unit, frequently used in south India.
Matha	A centre of education attached to a temple or religious establishment.
Matsyanyaya	A political theory where, in a state of anarchy, the strong devour the weak.
Maya	Illusion.
Moksha	Release from the cycle of rebirth.
Nadu	An administrative unit, frequently used in south India.
Nagara	Style of temple architecture developed in central and northern India.
Nirvana	Release from the cycle of rebirth.
Nishaka	The term used for a coin.
Pali	A Sanskrit-based language in which the Buddhist scriptures were recorded in Ceylon.
Pana	A term used for coin
Pasupata	A Saivite sect.
Puranas	The Hindu text containing the history of various dynasties.
Purohita	Chief priest.
Rajuka	An official designation used in the Mauryan period.
Rashtra	Country.
Sabha	An assembly of a few select ones/elders first found in *the RigVeda*.
Samiti	A larger assembly.
Samkhya	One of the six major schools of philosophy in ancient India.
Sati	A virtuous woman; one who has immolated herself on the funeral pyre of her husband.
Senapati	Commander of the army.
Sangam	The earliest phase of Tamil literature.
Satamana	A silver coin which weighed about 180 grains.
Shikhara	Tower surmounting a temple.
Shreni	Guild, organisation of craftsmen and merchants.

Svetambara	One of the two major Jaina sects, which follows the code of wearing white clothes.
Stupa	Domical structure containing relics of the Buddha.
Tantric	A religious cult.
Theravada	A Buddhist sect.
Upanishads	The philosophical texts included in Vedic literature.
Varna	Four-fold division of Hindu society.
Vedanta	One of the six major philosophical schools in ancient India.
Vihara	Buddhist monastery.
Yavana	Term used in Indian sources for the people of western Asia, Greeks and Romans.
Yoga	One of the six major schools of philosophy in ancient India.
Yuga	Any of the four ages of the life of the world.

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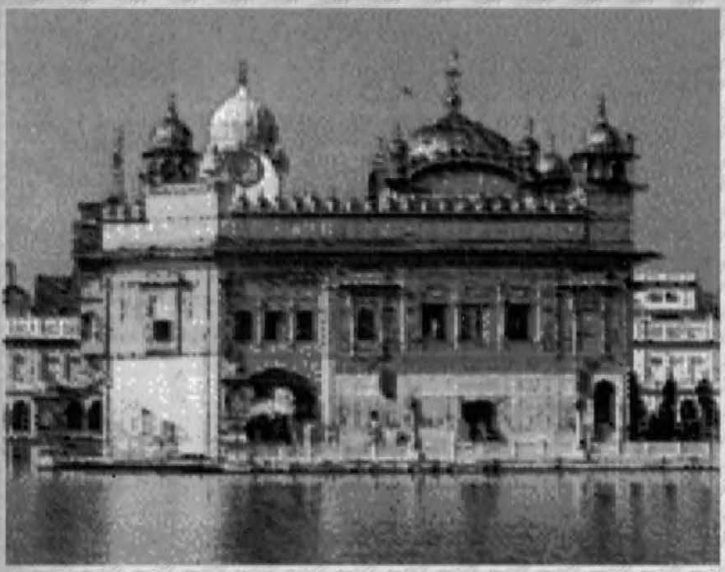

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